

“The Blood of the Youth Is Flowing”

The Political Class and Its Children Take on the Military in 1968

On the morning of August 29, 1968, hundreds of heavily armed policemen descended on the campus of the University of Brasília (UnB), located barely two miles from Brazil’s futuristic Congress. Brandishing arrest warrants for leftist student activists, they kicked in classroom doors, smashed laboratory equipment, and marched the children of Brazil’s elites across campus at gunpoint to be held in a basketball court for processing. When politicians arrived to intervene, they were met with insults and even beatings. The political class had largely supported or tolerated a “Revolution” to save the country from leftist subversion, economic ruin, and political malfeasance; the few who protested had been removed from office. Yet four years later it was clear that the military sought not a passing intervention but a profound transformation of Brazil’s political system and the political class with it. Although the military was adamant that it desired a partnership with politicians, politicians were to be the junior partners. In 1968, politicians’ mounting frustration reached a breaking point.

After explaining politicians’ reaction to the changes imposed after 1964, this chapter analyzes the first act in the showdown of 1968: the political class’s reaction to repression of the leftist-dominated student movement. Given the social and family ties between politicians and students, both regime allies and opponents were furious when the military attacked them with unprecedented (at least for them) levels of violence. Frustrated by their inability to stop it, they could only hurl denunciations at the police, the military, and the regime. How had a “Revolution” to save the country from communism devolved into Soviet-style repression? Regime allies had never dreamed that their “Revolution” would one day turn on their own children, and even the opposition was shocked at the ferocity of the violence.

FROM JUBILATION TO DISILLUSION:
A “REVOLUTION” GONE ASTRAY

On March 31, 1964, a military uprising drove the left-leaning president, João Goulart, into exile. Ten days later, Congress selected General Humberto Castelo Branco to serve the remainder of Goulart’s term. A significant portion of the political, landowning, and business classes was overjoyed. Goulart’s talk of leftist reforms was threatening to an elite that had been shaken by the Cuban Revolution, and his friendliness to labor, openness to land reform, and encouragement of popular mobilization challenged ingrained hierarchies. Moreover, Goulart was “the beloved disciple of the dead dictator” Getúlio Vargas,¹ whose centralizing rule was recalled with horror by regional elites.² For its protagonists, the coup represented not democracy’s collapse but its salvation. This message resonated strongly in São Paulo, which in 1932 had waged a brief war—the Constitutionalist Revolution—against Vargas. An *Estado de S. Paulo* editorial crowed, “As one man, São Paulo finds itself today fully mobilized, and, with the same spirit as three decades ago, rises up in defense of the present Constitution.”³

The most enthusiastic supporters came from the National Democratic Union (UDN), the right-leaning party established in 1945 to oppose Vargas. São Paulo federal deputy Herbert Levy applauded Brazil for “vigorously repelling its Cubanization and demonstrating its democratic maturity.”⁴ Yet it was not only the UDN that cheered. Governor Adhemar de Barros, of the Social Progressive Party (PSP), congratulated *paulistas* (residents of São Paulo) for “ris[ing] up . . . once more in defense of democratic ideals, safeguarding the supreme values of our Christian civilization.”⁵ Even future leaders of the opposition such as federal deputies Ulysses Guimarães and André Franco Montoro remained silent when Goulart was deposed.

It did not take long for the coup’s civilian collaborators to begin worrying that they might have made a mistake. Paulo Egydio Martins, a businessman and aspiring politician who had participated in the conspiracy, later complained, “Days after the Revolution, we civilians in São Paulo felt that our role had ended, that . . . we became totally forgotten. . . . We felt literally dismissed; we realized that power was in the hands of the Army and that we would have nothing more to do with it.”⁶ Sure enough, the military soon decreed an “Institutional Act” that, among other measures, granted the president sixty days to *casar* (summarily remove from office) politicians, fire public employees, and suspend the political rights of both for ten years.⁷ Still, the act stopped short of the sweeping intervention some coup supporters had urged, and rather than an attack on the political class as a whole, it was a temporary measure enabling the new government to rid itself of communists, *getulista* (Vargas-allied) holdovers, and assorted “subversives.”

The next sixty days saw the *cassação* (removal) of 3 former presidents (one of whom, Juscelino Kubitschek, was currently a senator), 3 governors, 62 current

and former federal deputies and substitutes, 53 current and former state deputies and substitutes, 15 current and former mayors and vice mayors, and 12 municipal councilors. The act mainly targeted allies of Goulart; his home state, Rio Grande do Sul, bore the worst of the punishment, with a quarter of the removals. As Montoro pointed out later, the act had not gone very far; it had an expiration date and left untouched the October 1965 presidential election.⁸ Even after June, when Kubitschek was cassado and Castelo Branco's term was extended by a year via a constitutional amendment, it seemed that by 1966 the "revolutionary process" would end, and direct elections would pick Castelo Branco's successor after an unprecedented two-year military intervention.

A crisis in October 1965 shattered this illusion and began to turn some of the political class against the regime. In response to the victory of Kubitschek-allied candidates for governor in two states, Castelo Branco decreed a new institutional act. The first act had had eleven articles; this one had thirty-three. In addition to renewing the president's right to cassar politicians and public employees (for seventeen months instead of sixty days), AI-2 (Ato Institucional no. 2) made presidential elections indirect, decided by a simple majority in Congress; allowed the president to place Congress in recess; packed the Supreme Court; and transferred jurisdiction over crimes against national security to military courts. Most traumatically for politicians, in an expression of military frustration with their factionalism, AI-2 abolished the existing political parties.⁹

Thirty-five years later, Montoro identified AI-2 as "the watershed of Brazilian political life," when "the government renounced all its promises of redemocratization and plunged the country into the night of the discretionary regime."¹⁰ Similarly, Paulo Egydio Martins later argued that by caving to military pressure, Castelo Branco had chosen the unity of the military over the good of the nation.¹¹ Yet at the time neither voiced his disagreement publicly. Those who did react did so cautiously, although their discontent often shone through. Upon receiving a call with news of AI-2, São Paulo's governor, Adhemar de Barros, was overheard remarking, "May God our Father help us to endure this crude blow." Yet later, when a telegram offering the justice minister's justification for the act arrived, the governor sent a reply expressing "the full trust of . . . São Paulo in the patriotic action of our President Castelo Branco."¹² The paulista UDN released a statement that applauded most of the act's measures but condemned, "with all vehemence," the abolition of the old party system while stating while that the UDN could not "applaud indirect elections, which abruptly alter the tradition of our republican life."¹³ A Social Democratic Party (PSD) statement explained that the party was "surprised by this discretionary manifestation" and promised "to fight for the full recuperation of the normality and tranquility of democratic life in our country."¹⁴ Deputy Doutel de Andrade, president of the Brazilian Labor Party (PTB), remarked that Castelo Branco had "dealt a mortal blow to what remained of republican institutions" and called on Congress to push back, lest Brazil suffer "the irremediable liquidation of the democratic regime."¹⁵

While AI-2 abolished the old parties, it also stipulated that the president could set rules for forming new ones. A one-party system; a two-party system with a government-allied party and an opposition; and a three-party system with a government-allied party, an opposition, and an “independent” party were all considered. Ultimately, a “complementary act” permitted three parties, each with a minimum of 20 senators and 120 federal deputies.¹⁶ Yet politicians were so eager to join the new government-allied party, ARENA, that there were barely enough legislators remaining to form even one more party. The few legislators who wished to risk open opposition (or who were unable to tolerate coexisting with enemies who had joined ARENA) formed the rival MDB.¹⁷ Some joined the MDB because they were unable to stomach the regime’s attacks on democracy; when asked in our interview whether he joined the party because it opposed the regime, former deputy José de Lurtz Sabiá (MDB-SP) exclaimed, “Obviously!”¹⁸ But he was in the minority. According to one oft-repeated legend, Castelo Branco had to intervene personally to convince Paraíba’s Rui Carneiro to join the MDB so that the party could manage twenty senators.¹⁹ Others simply picked whatever side their political rival had not chosen. After Pedro Ludovico, who had dominated Goiás politics for over three decades as appointed interventor, elected governor, and senator, chose the MDB, the state’s factions that opposed him joined ARENA, not because they were loyal to the regime, but because it represented their best chance to displace the state’s godfather.²⁰

Still, AI-2 did not go as far as many politicians feared it might. Castelo Branco used the act to remove only sixty-two politicians, including only six at the federal level. The most notable casualty was Adhemar de Barros, who despite his initial support had begun to spar with the generals publicly. In 1966, AI-3 extended indirect elections to governorships and authorized governors to nominate mayors of state capitals, to be confirmed by the state legislatures. Several months later, Castelo Branco chose General Artur da Costa e Silva as his successor, and the nomination was ratified by Congress in October. Castelo Branco and his legal experts also drafted a new constitution that expanded presidential and reduced legislative power and institutionalized many of the provisions of AI-2, such as indirect presidential elections.²¹ Congress rubber-stamped it in January 1967. The MDB complained that the new constitution had institutionalized military rule and suffocated basic liberties, yet MDB secretary general, José Martins Rodrigues, confided to US diplomats that the statement was “more a declaration of position than [a] call to sabotage [the] Constitution” and that the MDB would wait and see how Costa e Silva applied it before deciding whether to try to amend it (a move doomed to failure since ARENA enjoyed a commanding congressional majority).²²

Rodrigues’s position was typical. While they were displeased with new parties, indirect elections, and curtailed legislative powers, politicians were uncertain how to express their discontent. Vocal opposition was one option. Unconditional public support despite private disagreement was another. Yet another was measured criticism of specific measures without challenging military rule. Or a politician may have shifted positions depending on the winds at the moment, the instructions

of a prominent ally, or the cassação of a friend or mentor. Criticism thus sometimes came from unexpected sources. In a January 1968 interview, ARENA senator Carlos Carvalho Pinto, a former paulista governor, complained that the two-party system and indirect elections were “retarding dangerously” Brazil’s return to full democracy. He also argued that the military as an institution should have no political role beyond defending democratic institutions. Now that the military had saved Brazil from anarchy, civilian politicians must prove that they were responsible enough for power to be returned to them.²³ His discontent was representative. In January 1968, the magazine *Realidade* published the results of a survey of 246 federal deputies and senators (over half of Congress). An overwhelming 85 percent supported a multiparty system, 84 percent believed states did not have sufficient autonomy, 80 percent preferred direct presidential elections, and 65 percent thought the executive branch had taken over too many powers rightfully belonging to the legislature. Only 11 percent believed that the new Constitution reflected the aspirations of the Brazilian people. The regime’s encroachment on the prerogatives of the political class had provoked deep discontent in both parties.²⁴

Yet despite the curtailment of legislative powers and the enshrinement of indirect elections in an authoritarian constitution, things were looking up as 1968 began. AI-2 had expired on March 15, 1967, when Costa e Silva took office. The act had been used only sparingly; Costa e Silva began his term with talk of a “humanization” of the “Revolution”; and the new constitution, if it limited the powers of Congress, theoretically gave the regime the power it needed to transform Brazil without new institutional acts while stipulating that cassações could only be carried out via a Supreme Court trial, with congressional approval. The “Revolution’s” legitimacy was based on the claim that it had saved democratic institutions from dictatorship; it was thus essential for the military to collaborate, however one-sidedly, with politicians. In 1964, the UDN, never able to win power via elections, had conspired with the military to overthrow Goulart. Now they found themselves running Congress, and UDN stalwarts like Senator Daniel Krieger (president of ARENA) and federal deputy Rondon Pacheco (the president’s civilian chief of staff) enjoyed ready access to the president. Even in the MDB politicians remained free to criticize the government. By early 1968, then, the political class had reached an uneasy truce with the military, with hope that the “revolutionary” cycle would soon draw to a close.

“I STAND IN SOLIDARITY WITH THE STUDENTS”: POLITICIANS AND THE STUDENT MOVEMENT

Yet in 1968 this truce began to collapse as the military violently repressed the student movement. On March 28, Edson Luís, a Rio de Janeiro secondary student, was killed by police during a protest over cafeteria food. Previously student demonstrations had focused on issues like the number of admissions slots and university governance; other than the most politically active, few cared about

overthrowing the regime.²⁵ Now Luís’s death galvanized students to take to the streets. The largest demonstration occurred in June when students marched in Rio de Janeiro in the famous March of the 100,000. As the size and political tone of the protests increased, so too did the repression, culminating in the arrest of hundreds of student activists at the clandestine congress of the banned National Student Union (UNE) in October.

All the members of the MDB took the students’ side, and they were joined by a significant minority of arenistas. For in a country where a university education was the privilege of a tiny elite, the protesting students were “our children, our brothers, our relatives.”²⁶ Guanabara deputy Breno da Silveira had a son attending UnB who was arrested in March; his other son was part of the army force sent to break up the demonstration.²⁷ One of the organizers of the March of the 100,000, Vladimir Palmeira, was the son of ARENA senator Rui Palmeira. And the student activist son of deputy Pedro Celestino Filho (MDB-GO), Paulo de Tarso, would be “disappeared” by the regime in 1971.²⁸ As former colonel and ARENA deputy Paulo Nunes Leal said, “When we have children in school, we . . . [imagine] that the parents who cry today at the disappearance of their beloved child could be us, since no one can presume to claim that their child will never participate in a student demonstration.”²⁹ Mário Piva put it more pointedly: “Those who today try to defend the ones responsible [for the death of Luís] or who overlook the graveness of the problem were either never young themselves, or don’t have children studying in university like I do.”³⁰

Politicians saw younger versions of themselves in students, who one deputy called “the vanguard of the people’s conscience.”³¹ It was natural that the deputies, over 80 percent of whom had attended university, would identify with students; in them they saw “future economic, political, and financial leaders,” the “new elite of an ignorant country.”³² José Mandelli explained, “The youth of today will be the men of tomorrow. It is they who should take our place in public affairs, as professors, in the liberal professions, in trade.”³³ Mário Covas, Chamber minority leader, was particularly impressed with Honestino Guimarães, a student leader at UnB, once remarking to his wife, “He’s going to be a great politician. . . . I was overcome when I heard that born leader.”³⁴ Regime allies such as Júlio de Mesquita Neto (son of the owner of *O Estado de S. Paulo*) and São Paulo governor Roberto de Abreu Sodré had fought as students against the Vargas regime decades before. Their activities generated a file with the São Paulo political police and earned the latter more arrests than he could count.³⁵ Although Miguel Feu Rosa was too young to have opposed Vargas, he spoke for many who had when he said, “Whatever my party affiliation, I cannot deny my origins. It was in student politics that I forged my personality as a public man. . . . I stand in solidarity with the students of my country; I participate in their sufferings and in their pain.”³⁶ As former deputy Léo de Almeida Neves explained in 2015, “It was a serious error for the dictatorship to ban student organizations because that is where the country’s political leaders were shaped.”³⁷

As university graduates in a country where most did not complete primary school, members of Congress could identify with student activists in ways that they could not with members of other social movements. Idealistic by nature, students were “generous, impulsive, noble, and patriotic,” and their elders owed them “a little bit of understanding.”³⁸ They were “the most enlightened segment of the Brazilian population, . . . citizens who have a cultural and humanistic refinement far above the average.”³⁹ While many deputies may have frowned upon the repression of labor unions and peasant movements, repression of students was different because it pitted uneducated, lower-class, often Black and Brown police against students who reminded politicians of themselves.⁴⁰ Their denunciation of violence against students was the indignant cry, “How dare you do this to people like us!”

The reality was that most Brazilian university students had little in common with the politicians whose families had walked the halls of power since at least the Proclamation of the Republic in 1889. As Brazil industrialized in the 1950s and a growing middle class demanded access to higher education, the populist governments of Vargas and Kubitschek had greatly expanded the university system, and in the 1960s the military regime accelerated this trend. University enrollments grew from 27,253 in 1945 to 93,202 in 1960 to 278,295 in 1968.⁴¹ Most of these students came not from the political elite but from the growing and largely immigrant-descended middle classes in the industrializing Southeast and South.

Yet none of this mattered to politicians who were nostalgic about their own activism of yesteryear; whatever the actual composition of Brazilian universities in 1968, politicians viewed those involved in the student movement as similar to themselves and deserving of deferential treatment from their “inferiors.” Anecdotal evidence indicates that the student movement was largely made up of upper-class students for, unlike middle-class students, who often had to work while they studied, the children of the elite enjoyed financial support from their parents, leaving plenty of time for activism.⁴² And even if they did not come from the same social class, chances are they looked a lot like politicians. Although data on the racial composition of Brazilian universities in the 1960s are difficult to obtain, if the vast majority of students did indeed come from the middle and upper classes, it is almost certain that the vast majority were also white, according to Brazilian standards.⁴³

In the wake of each new confrontation, senators and deputies denounced the violence, nearly invariably blaming the police and, occasionally, the military. Márcio Moreira Alves was perhaps the most forceful: “What this military regime has done in Brazil is transform every uniform into the object of the people’s execration. . . . [The government] has turned [the Armed Forces] into a shelter of bandits.”⁴⁴ Antônio Cunha Bueno, who during his studies at the São Paulo Law School had been active in student politics, offered his “vehement protest” of police repression of students, which, “if not restrained, will inevitably create the climate necessary for the implantation of a dictatorship.”⁴⁵ The protests came most frequently from younger, vocal members of the MDB, but they were joined by

arenistas (ARENA members) who were aghast at the attacks on students. Others, while deploring police violence and defending the students, argued that nefarious, communist subversives were exploiting students’ “enthusiasm, good faith, and excitement” in order to advance their own “criminal and unspeakable objectives.”⁴⁶ When student protests included the burning of American flags or throwing rocks at the American embassy, according to Nazir Miguel, “that is communist infiltration. And communists belong in jail, because they are subversives. Students should be in school studying, not starting street riots.”⁴⁷ Still, few *arenistas* defended the police or attempted to shift the debate to violence committed by students.⁴⁸ Most government allies kept silent, joined by more prudent oppositionists.

Other politicians, particularly from the opposition, left the halls of Congress and joined students in the streets. Such activities were controversial; ARENA’s Haroldo Leon Peres provoked a shouting match when he implied that MDB deputies were inciting students and thus shared responsibility for the violence.⁴⁹ The image of politicians standing alongside “subversives” who were often related to them must have infuriated those in the military who already resented the political class. As Costa e Silva’s military chief of staff, General Jayme Portella, complained, opposition deputies, “using their immunities, were inciting agitation.”⁵⁰

MEDIA FILE 1. Tumult during the speech of Haroldo Leon Peres, March 29, 1968.
SOURCE: Câmara dos Deputados, Coordenação de Audiovisual (COAUD), Arquivo Sonoro, <http://imagem.camara.gov.br/internet/audio/default.asp>.



However, there were limits to politicians’ involvement. Covas insisted that his respect for the autonomy of the student movement would not permit him to interfere in its internal functioning; his role was limited to dialogue and mediation.⁵¹ Moreira Alves hit closer to the truth when he argued that the real barrier to deeper involvement was that leftist student activists were suspicious of even opposition politicians, whose attempts to oppose the regime through legal channels, they believed, were insufficiently revolutionary.⁵² In a meeting of MDB leadership, deputy Edgar Godoy da Mata Machado (MDB-MG) admitted, “Students and workers want nothing to do with the MDB because they believe that the current political system is artificial and inauthentic.”⁵³ The former student leader Franklin Martins, writing in 2002, argued that a chasm separated the student movement from opposition politicians: “They had been defeated in 1964 without putting up any resistance. . . . Why, then, should the youth take their advice into account?” Their very presence in Congress was a betrayal that proved how tepid their opposition was. The MDB was merely “a plaything in the hands of the military whose sole objective was to prop up a simulacrum of a Congress and a mimicry of democracy.”⁵⁴

Students heaped even more scorn upon politicians who supported the regime; even if they stood up to the military, “it was . . . because they had been thrown overboard by those who held power.”⁵⁵ In São Paulo, students’ anger was vividly illustrated on May Day, when Sodré attempted to speak to ten thousand workers and students but was drowned out with cries of “Murderer!” Soon the jeers were accompanied by eggs, wood, and rocks, and after he was hit in the head by a rock (or in his account, a nail-studded potato), the governor retreated to the safety of a cathedral.⁵⁶ Students and workers took over the stage and unfurled a banner with an image of Ché Guevara.⁵⁷ Although Sodré—not inaccurately—blamed communist infiltrators, the event strikingly demonstrated the disgust student activists felt for regime-allied politicians.⁵⁸ If politicians could look back on their own militancy with nostalgia, the very students with whom they sympathized were determined not to grow up to be like them.

“IT IS OUR CHILDREN WHO ARE THERE”:
THE INVASION OF THE UNIVERSIDADE DE BRASÍLIA

Although the largest marches took place in Rio and repression occurred across the country, federal legislators were most directly involved in Brasília.⁵⁹ In part this was because of the capital’s isolation. Though Brazilians had long dreamed of establishing a capital in the sparsely populated interior, it was only during Kubitschek’s administration that it came to fruition. Designed in the shape of an airplane, its modernist buildings drawn up by the communist architect Oscar Niemeyer, Brasília potently symbolized Brazil as the “country of the future.” But the city had been rushed to completion in 1960, barely in time for Kubitschek to inaugurate it, and even by 1968 many government agencies had yet to relocate from Rio. Located over a thousand kilometers from Rio and São Paulo, its isolation was exacerbated by poor roads and unreliable telephone service. As one deputy lamented, “We live in a capital that most of the time is poorly informed about the reality of events, due to its distance from the large cities where news is made.”⁶⁰ The metropolitan area’s population was only 400,000 in 1968; many were migrant laborers who had little in common with legislators and federal employees. Its symbolism as the harbinger of a modernizing Brazil combined with its isolation meant that events in Brasília were enormously relevant to politicians forced to spend time there.

This was particularly true for events at UnB, where politicians’ children often studied. The University of Brasília was part of the city’s original “pilot plan”—a national university for the new capital of a modernizing nation. In the vision of its first rector, the anthropologist Darcy Ribeiro, UnB would challenge outmoded ideas about admissions, pedagogy, and university governance. The university was also unique at the time in that it united all its academic programs on a single campus—an arrangement that not only facilitated intellectual exchange but also heightened opportunities for mobilization.⁶¹ Yet only two years after he began to

implement his plan, the coup brought to power the enemies of Ribeiro, who had been Goulart’s minister of education and culture and later his civilian chief of staff, and the generals fired him almost immediately. After all, academics who held progressive ideas about education may have also been subversive. UnB’s location at the center of political power and its unorthodox approach placed it squarely in the regime’s gaze. The campus, barely six years old in 1968, was only four kilometers from Congress. Demonstrations nearly always occurred on weekdays, when it was easiest to assemble a crowd and when Congress was in session.⁶² Thus while politicians stayed informed about events in their home states, their proximity to UnB during the week meant that they were always aware of events there, often more than at universities back home.

UnB students knew that their deputy or senator fathers (or friends’ fathers) enjoyed a measure of security because of their parliamentary immunity, which protected them from arrest. After all, Covas and other deputies had demanded an explanation from the justice minister and visited students in the hospital in April 1967 after police invaded the UnB library and beat students protesting the visit of the US ambassador. When Edson Luís was killed in March, UnB students again mobilized, and a group of opposition deputies attended their protest march. When the police began attacking the students, Covas and fellow deputies attempted to intervene, but the police ignored their pleas, and in the melee deputy José Martins Rodrigues was hit in the head with a truncheon. A few days later, after students captured a plainclothes National Information Service (SNI) agent and confiscated his revolver, at the urging of their professors they agreed to give it back—but only if they could hand it over to an opposition deputy. Then, at a Mass to commemorate the death of Luís, police arrived to arrest Honestino Guimarães; he fled into the sacristy, and while the bishop held the police at bay, students rushed to Congress, where the congressional leadership was in the midst of a meeting with other student leaders to negotiate the end of the military occupation of the campus. Covas and ARENA vice-leader Peres—who had accused opposition deputies of inciting student violence—rushed to the church and saved Guimarães from arrest, and Guimarães and other student leaders left in official cars of the Chamber.⁶³ On another occasion, students took refuge in Congress after a demonstration; after twelve hours of negotiations, politicians used their private cars to take the students home.⁶⁴ And at a march at the end of June, Covas and several other MDB deputies marched at the head of the students’ procession. Later Covas hid Guimarães and five other students in his apartment with his family for days while the police searched for them.⁶⁵

On the morning of August 29, the long-standing tension between the regime and UnB erupted into open conflict. With arrest warrants for Guimarães and four other “subversives,” officers of the political and social police (DOPS) and federal police, backed up by two hundred military police officers, descended on the campus “as though they were Russians entering Prague” and arrested Guimarães.⁶⁶

Students fought back, a patrol car was tipped over and set on fire, and police began a brutal sweep, kicking in doors, smashing lab equipment, and using tear gas, truncheons, rifles, and machine guns to round up students and herd them to a basketball court for processing. One student was shot in the head, another in the knee, and others suffered broken bones, either at the hands of the police or when they fell attempting to flee.⁶⁷

Congress was in the midst of its morning session when the invasion began. In the Senate, Aurélio Vianna (MDB-GB) announced that he had just heard news of a confrontation at UnB and would be leaving with a group of senators to find out what was happening. Celestino Filho made a similar announcement in the Chamber. At the urging of ARENA leader Ernani Sátiro and Chamber president José Bonifácio Lafayette de Andrada (great-great nephew of the famed patriarch of Brazilian independence, José Bonifácio de Andrada e Silva), a group of deputies rushed to their cars and departed for UnB, a short drive down Brasília's broad avenues. All told, at least twenty deputies and three senators converged on the campus.⁶⁸ São Paulo deputy José Santilli Sobrinho rushed to UnB with his son to pick up his daughter. When they exited their car, police surrounded them and began to beat the son with a truncheon. Santilli Sobrinho attempted to intervene, waving his congressional identification and crying out that he was a deputy, but the police knocked the ID out of his hand and began to beat him too, shouting, "That's why we're doing this!"⁶⁹ They were only saved from arrest when other legislators intervened as they were being dragged to a police car, with Santilli Sobrinho shouting, "You're beating a federal deputy! I protest!" The police tried to arrest them too, until Senator Argemiro de Figueiredo (MDB-PB), whose own son was in the basketball court, stated that if the officers attempted to arrest legislators, they wouldn't go without a fight.⁷⁰

The university was in chaos. Politicians saw hundreds of students marched across the campus at machine gun point. The police refused to allow wounded students to leave for the hospital before receiving higher orders.⁷¹ The press noted indignantly that women students and faculty had fainted under the stress and that the police had entered restrooms where women were hiding.⁷² An ARENA deputy gave an impromptu speech calling for reductions in funding for DOPS and the SNI, and Rodrigues told a federal police commander, "General, I'm proud to be on the side of the students and the people, and against these bandits," to which the commander shot back, "You're the bandit!"⁷³ Even ARENA deputy Clovis Stenzel, a UnB professor and enthusiastic supporter of the regime, was overheard exclaiming, "I, who am identified as belonging to the hard line, think all of this is an atrocity."⁷⁴

Eventually the police let most students leave, arresting only a few "ringleaders." They left behind bloodstained floors, spent shell casings, and shattered lab equipment. Politicians were in shock, and all who maintained a home in Brasília had a story to tell. Oswaldo Zanello feared for his daughter, who had received



IMAGE 1. Federal deputies scuffle with police at UnB. SOURCE: Arquivo Central da UnB.



IMAGE 2. Federal deputy José Santilli Sobrinho attempting to protect his children from arrest. SOURCE: Arquivo Central da UnB.

threats from DOPS. Aniz Badra was stung when his son accused him of serving a Nazi government.⁷⁵ Deputies' children and their friends' children had been treated like common criminals, and they themselves had suffered violence and threats of arrest by the police, who respected neither congressional credentials nor social class. Few had any doubts as to the source of the invasion. It may have been the police who conducted it, but the orders had obviously come from above. The most likely source appeared to be the hated Justice Minister Luis Antônio da Gama e Silva, to whom the federal police were subordinate.⁷⁶

Reaction from Congress was immediate and outraged. After the announcement of the invasion, sixteen of the remaining thirty-three deputies on the docket discarded their prepared remarks to denounce it. Nearly all questioned why hundreds of police were necessary to arrest one student. Two deputies compared it to the Soviet crackdown on Czechoslovakia's Prague Spring the week before.⁷⁷ Others took the opportunity to inveigh against those who gave the police their orders (by implication, the military). Getúlio Moura (MDB-RJ), for example, stated, "We protest against those who ordered these poor, incompetent, completely unlettered and incapable policemen to commit these acts of violence."⁷⁸ Before rushing to UnB, the MDB's Rodrigues expressed feelings likely shared by many deputies: "It is our children who are there, and we find ourselves powerless."⁷⁹

Emotions were raw during the tumultuous afternoon session; it nearly had to be suspended five times amid hostile confrontations.⁸⁰ Wilson Martins lamented, "Those of us who have children in university, instead of being content, expecting that tomorrow we'll have a doctor, an engineer, a liberal professional in our home, [now] fear at every moment that we'll find their corpse in their own classrooms."⁸¹ Seven deputies, including two from ARENA, gave speeches decrying the invasion, and eleven more, including three arenistas, offered sympathetic rejoinders to a speech by paulista Gastone Righi Cuoghi excoriating the police. Moreira Alves inveighed, "We don't have a government in this country; we have a mob in power, a gang, a group that uses its hired guns against the nation."⁸² Another deputy argued that it was clear that the police had received their orders from the army and that the arrest warrants were but a pretext for an operation of psychological warfare designed to demoralize the university. Righi agreed, claiming that the factions of the military now in power had opposed placing a university in Brasília out of fear of the unrest fifteen thousand students could generate.⁸³ Only paulista Cantídio Sampaio supported the police, claiming that the students attacked them first. When fellow paulista David Lerer called him a liar, Sampaio punched him in the face.⁸⁴

But not everyone was incensed. For although many arenistas defended the students, a significant minority sided enthusiastically with the military. Despite both parties' lack of ideological cohesion, ARENA was more likely to attract politicians with a deeply conservative worldview that venerated authority, eschewed disorder, and loathed leftist politics. ARENA vice-leader Peres spoke for these when

he begged the deputies to suspend judgment until all the facts were known. After all, abuses were unavoidable in a tense atmosphere. Deputies should know this, since they had all been involved in rallies or protests that had gotten out of hand. What right did they have to cast stones when they had similarly repressed unruly mobs?⁸⁵ ARENA's Carlos de Brito Velho (a physician by training) interrupted, to thunderous applause, “I'll cast the first stone! . . . I have committed many acts of violence against the strong and the powerful, but against the weak, never.”⁸⁶ Regardless, Peres emphasized, if the police committed excesses, the students had too; after all, a police car had been set afire, and an officer had allegedly been shot in the arm.⁸⁷ When Ernani Sátiro, ARENA's leader, defended Peres for his “equilibrium and serenity,” he was roundly booed, as Unírio Machado exclaimed, “How can you be so callous? Let heaven be astonished!” When Bonifácio charged the deputies to listen “with tranquility,” Machado cried, “Tranquility? When the blood of the youth is flowing? I want to see how tranquil some of you are when it's your children in this situation!”⁸⁸

Mário Covas gave the MDB's official position in a speech sufficiently vehement that he withheld it from publication in the *Diário da Câmara dos Deputados*, the daily record of the Chamber's proceedings. He began with a blow-by-blow account of events at UnB, emphasizing that unlike Peres's “police version,” his account contained the eyewitness testimonies of deputies and professors. Other deputies added details as he went along. Moreira Alves reported that the student shot in the head had been left lying atop a table for an hour before the police would allow him to be taken to the hospital. Mário Maia, a practicing physician, arrived from the hospital where he had just served as the anesthesiologist for the brain surgery that saved the student's life. An ARENA deputy received lengthy applause when he proposed that the Brazilian flag above Congress be lowered to half-mast in mourning.⁸⁹

For Covas, the police's boorish behavior was the result of a society “that did not educate them . . . to have the human reactions worthy of a civilized people.” The real fault for the repression lay with the government, which had still not held anyone responsible for the killing of Edson Luís, a “dictatorship” that used the “magic word” “subversive” as an “excuse for all sorts of violence.” He stated that if he thought that resigning from Congress could help the students' cause, he would do it instantly and promised that if he found himself in a similar situation again, he would offer himself for the police to beat instead. Although he had no children in college, after a day like this he suspected that he may not want them to go when they grew up; “a lack of knowledge and culture” might be preferable to “one day having to pass through the grievance and humiliation” that students in Brasília had experienced today.⁹⁰

The invasion was hotly discussed into the next week. Behind the scenes, some arenistas were infuriated. Although Sampaio had punched Lerer for questioning his claim that the students had attacked first, his wife was rumored to belong

to a group of women preparing a letter to Costa e Silva demanding that he stop ordering their husbands to defend lies. And it was later claimed that Jorge Curi had proposed that ARENA vice-leaders refrain from giving speeches defending the government: "No one can violate their conscience to defend the indefensible. I've had it with tolerance and swallowing toads."⁹¹ Over the next three weekdays, forty-seven deputies gave speeches condemning the invasion. The first two days, Thursday and Friday, they maintained a degree of caution by focusing their attacks on the the police and the Costa e Silva administration rather than the military as an institution. But as days passed without any explanation for the assault on UnB, frustration among the deputies began to mount. Rumor had it that ARENA leader Sátiro had gone to the presidential palace on Friday seeking an explanation but had been denied an audience.⁹² On Monday MDB deputies, especially younger ones known for their vehement criticisms of the government, went on the attack.

Hermano Alves complained that five days had passed with no investigation or identification of those responsible and speculated that the silence was because those who had issued the orders were "shielding themselves with Army officers' uniforms."⁹³ Rodrigues interjected that he had heard that the police and DOPS officers who ordered the invasion were actually army officers assigned to the police forces, noting sarcastically, "All the honors for this exceptional military operation go to those who make up . . . the 'glorious Army of Caxias.'"⁹⁴ Everyone conceded that the invasion was not the fault of the entire army but rather of "militarist" extremists whose paranoid obsession with subversion threatened to distract the Armed Forces from their true mission.⁹⁵ The result of this alienation of the military from the people, Jairo Brum warned, could be "a blood-soaked tragedy," because "one day Brazilians will . . . take to the streets with weapons in hand to defend themselves from the police who . . . threaten us and wound our children."⁹⁶ Yet amid these terrible events Congress was powerless, its leadership shirking its duty to demand an explanation. Arenista Paulo d'Araújo Freire, who had criticized students for supposed acts of violence in March, now exclaimed, "I will by no means give my modest vote to support the government as long as they refuse to punish these bandits and criminals who want to implant Hitler's system in Brazil."⁹⁷

It was then the turn of Márcio Moreira Alves. No one could have imagined that his speeches this day and the next would spark a showdown between the military and the political class. Indeed, the tone of his September 2 speech was much like those that preceded it. Moreira Alves complained that there were no answers, only questions, about events at UnB. Who had ordered the invasion? To what extent were Gama e Silva and the justice ministry responsible? How would the government respond? The crescendo came in a series of rhetorical questions:

When will the nation's hemorrhage be stanchd? When will troops stop machine-gunning the people in the streets? When will a boot kicking in a lab door cease to be the government's proposal for university reform? When will we, . . . when we see

our children leave for school, be sure that they will not return carried on a stretcher, cudged, or machine-gunned? When will we be able to trust those who ought to execute and carry out the law? When will the police stop being a band of criminals? *When will the Army stop serving as shelter for torturers?*⁹⁸

Mariano Beck broke in to read a letter signed by 175 “Mothers and Wives of Brasília,” at least 30 of whom were married to deputies and senators. The letter decried the “scenes of savagery and indescribable violence that once again have bloodied the University of Brasília. . . . What we mothers and wives want is only to see our children and husbands studying and working in peace and security.”⁹⁹ While the mothers and wives may or may not have had children at UnB (the wife of the thirty-two-year old Moreira Alves, for example, had neither a husband young enough nor children old enough to be in college), the discursive kinship that they invoked illustrates just how much politicians identified with students.

Moreira Alves’s speech the next day added fuel to the fire. This time he proposed that to protest the military’s refusal to investigate its role in the UnB invasion, parents keep their children away from military-sponsored Independence Day festivities on September 7 and that young women “who dance with the cadets and date the young officers” withhold sexual favors. Tying his tongue-in-cheek proposal, which he later dubbed “Operation Lysistrata,” to the manifesto from the “wives and mothers of Brasília,” he suggested that the boycott could serve as part of a wider movement of women’s resistance.¹⁰⁰ As he pointed out later, his suggestion (which he said he hoped the girlfriends had taken) was a thinly veiled attack on the military’s manhood: “Here was this spoiled brat, scion of a long line of politicians[,] . . . not only calling them a gang of torturers, but going to the groin and attacking their machismo!”¹⁰¹ Questioning the military’s morality and patriotism was bad; challenging its manhood was worse.

Born in Rio de Janeiro, Moreira Alves came from a Minas Gerais family in which “politics was lived intensely.” His paternal grandfather had served for nearly three decades as a federal deputy during the First Republic, a brother of his paternal grandmother was foreign relations minister for Vargas, and his father was an appointed mayor of Petrópolis under Vargas.¹⁰² After several years as a political reporter for the left-leaning *Correio da Manhã*, where he won the Brazilian equivalent of the Pulitzer Prize for his coverage of a shootout in the Alagoas legislative assembly (written from a hospital bed after being wounded in the melee), he parlayed his journalistic accomplishments into a successful run for Congress in 1966.¹⁰³ From the beginning, he was a vociferous opponent of the regime; his 1967 book denouncing torture won him no friends in the military.¹⁰⁴ In Brasília, he initially rented a house on Lake Paranoá with three other left-leaning MDB deputies that was humorously dubbed the “Socialist Republic on the Lake.” He had been born into politics, was fluent in English and French, and was married to a French woman; in many respects he personified the ideal member of the political class.

Moreira Alves and twenty to thirty other young deputies comprised a bloc in Congress notorious for its impassioned speeches rephending the government for its attacks on democratic institutions, torture, and insufficiently nationalist economic policies. São Paulo's Ivette Vargas derisively dubbed the group the *imatuross* (immature ones). The ideal "public man" (*homem público*) was assumed (at least discursively) to be stately and dignified, firm in his convictions but measured in his reactions, willing to defend his honor but knowing when to turn the other cheek. The *imatuross*, with their fiery speeches and brash behavior, were more akin to impulsive students than *homens públicos*. As Moreira Alves complained later, "Every conservative body calls those who represent rebellious forces of change 'immature,' 'hasty,' 'insane,' 'infantile,' as if adjectives could stop time."¹⁰⁵ The *imatuross* delighted in interrupting *arenistas'* speeches with attacks on the government; Moreira Alves later ruefully recalled a time when one of the "little bastards who tried to make a career of kissing the military's ass" complained that they had ruined the speech he had paid someone to write and intended to distribute to his constituents.¹⁰⁶ The *imatuross* were not well liked, and Moreira Alves attracted little sympathy. One ARENA deputy described him as "very radical, intolerant in his ideas, and not very amenable to democratic dialogue. He has an enraged disposition and is almost always full of resentment."¹⁰⁷

The first speech, taken alone, might not have had further repercussions. After all, he had gotten away with calling the army a "shelter of bandits" in March—an expression almost identical to his "shelter of torturers" comment now. Once Moreira Alves gave the speech, if the Chamber leadership had been more attentive, the offending phrases might have been stricken before the *Diário da Câmara* was published, or the *Diário da Câmara* could have been withheld from circulation. Indeed, after he had called the government "bandits and gangsters" on August 29, the Chamber leadership had censored "bandits," leaving only "gangsters," which he had uttered in English.¹⁰⁸ Something similar may have happened on September 3. A comparison of the typed transcript of the second speech with the published version reveals minor edits, made by the Chamber leadership or Moreira Alves himself, in an effort to soften the harsh language. The version in the typed notes urged young women who *frequêntam* young officers to boycott them. *Frequêntar*, which translates into English as "to frequent," can also mean "to have relations with," or, euphemistically, "to have sexual relations with." In the notes, however, *frequêntar* is crossed out and replaced with a handwritten *namorar*, meaning "to date"; its substitution for the sexually charged *frequêntar* was likely an attempt to render the speech less objectionable.¹⁰⁹

Another way to limit the fallout would have been for ARENA deputies to give speeches of their own defending the military. But none did. Their silence indicates that Jorge Curi, who had urged ARENA vice-leaders to refrain from defending the government, spoke for many. Even the majority leader, Sátiro, had been tepid in his defense of the regime. He had remained absent for days, hoping to avoid

explaining why he had not yet wrangled an explanation for the invasion from Costa e Silva; he briefly entered during Moreira Alves's first speech, only to leave abruptly when he realized its subject. When he finally spoke that afternoon, he promised that he would offer an explanation once he had one.¹¹⁰

Published on September 3–4 in the *Diário da Câmara*, the speeches were distributed in the barracks as an example of the contempt in which the political class held the military.¹¹¹ Military critics of Moreira Alves seized on three passages—the reference to a “shelter for torturers,” the proposal to boycott Independence Day, and, above all, the suggestion that young women should “boycott” their soldier companions. On September 5, Army Minister Lyra Tavares requested that Costa e Silva take measures to prevent more attacks like these and repair the damage done to the military's honor.¹¹² The stage was set for an unprecedented showdown.

CONCLUSIONS

In 1968, the indignities that had been heaped on politicians since 1964 culminated in the repression of the student movement. Politicians had watched, even collaborated, as colleagues were removed, institutional acts were decreed, and a new constitution was imposed. Yet now the military had targeted their children and their friends, the privileged elite who despite their youthful rebellion would one day assume their place as leaders of Brazil. These attacks on their children and their social class were more than many politicians could bear, and they showed their displeasure by protecting students from arrest, joining their marches, and blasting the regime for its ham-fisted handling of a situation that, in their eyes, should have been handled with understanding.

On the surface, this sympathy is surprising. Few politicians, even on the Left, found much in common ideologically with students who read Marx and Mao, idolized Fidel and Ché, and dreamed of a revolution to overturn the structures that facilitated the dominance of the political class (and the students themselves). Former leaders of the student movement have emphasized these differences. Students would never dream of becoming politicians themselves; for them, politics were only useful when “directed toward transforming society, not gaining posts or positions.”¹¹³ Scholars have similarly highlighted the divergences between the students of 1968 and parliamentary politics.¹¹⁴ In part, this is because scholars have focused on Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, where politicians took a less prominent role than in Brasília. But this oversight is also due to their assimilation of the students' antipolitical rhetoric.

Yet these differences were not enough to overcome ties of family and class. Indeed, several prominent student leaders were the sons of politicians. Politicians sympathized with the students because they were their own children, because they remembered their own days as student activists with nostalgia, or because students belonged to their social class. Perhaps they were communists; perhaps they

were “subversive.” But that was of no account, for they were politicians’ children. When students were harassed by unlettered soldiers and policemen, it was a fundamental violation of the way the political class believed the world should work.

When students appealed for politicians’ assistance, it was because they recognized that they were members of the same class and could expect aid. It is difficult to imagine many politicians from either party inviting trade unionists or rural workers to hide in Congress from the police. Despite their Marxist ideology, student activists were cut from the same cloth as their parents, and many, like Franklin Martins, São Paulo student leaders José Dirceu, José Serra, and Aloysio Nunes Ferreira Filho, and most notably, student and armed militant Dilma Rousseff, would go on to have political careers of their own. Time has proven that Covas was correct when he equated Honestino Guimarães’s leadership of students with preparation for politics.¹¹⁵

In 1968, however, the military had little patience for leftist students or their politician parents. Though there are few sources relating the military’s reaction, it is not difficult to imagine. The “Revolution” had been necessary, in their eyes, to root out subversion, wherever it might be found. If communist “subversion” came from the children of Brazil’s political elites, the response should be no different than if they were rural workers, trade unionists, or leftist priests. But instead of recognizing the danger and repudiating their children’s errors, politicians, including supposed allies, were seeking to shield them. To the military, suspicious of civilian politicians from the outset, it must have looked as though they tolerated such behavior because they secretly wished that they too could fight the regime. Adding insult to injury, out-of-control oppositionists like Moreira Alves were recasting the military doing its duty as torture, questioning their patriotism, and challenging their manhood. The time had come to send a message to the political class once and for all, and the regime resolved to do so by demanding that Congress revoke Moreira Alves’s immunity so that he could be tried for his insults to military honor. The next chapter turns to the dramatic confrontation that ensued.