

“The Political Class Has Learned Nothing”

The Military Punishes the Political Class

On December 18, 1968, five days after the decree of AI-5, Mário Covas sat at home with his wife, Lila, when there was a knock at the door. Two federal policemen informed him that they had been sent on a “disagreeable task,” showing an arrest warrant signed by the regional military commander. While Lila made coffee, Covas changed clothes. As he recalled in a handwritten prison diary, he ordinarily would have argued that parliamentary immunity precluded his arrest. But in days like these, “when any timidity has been eliminated,” resistance was pointless. Besides, many of his colleagues, “estimable and honorable men,” had already been jailed. Whether due to “honor . . . or a little bit of vanity,” the knock came as a “relief.”¹ The arrest was a validation of his stand for principle, a vindication of his honor as a public man.

The ten months following the decree of AI-5 were among the darkest the Brazilian political class had ever known, with the indefinite closure of Congress, the arrest of dozens of politicians, and the cassação of over 330 colleagues at all levels. It was reminiscent of the Estado Novo, so reviled by the masterminds of 1964. Certainly older arenistas must have drawn parallels between themselves and the *tenentes*, the idealistic young officers who had fought to overthrow the First Republic in the 1920s, only to see their dreams dashed by Getúlio Vargas’s centralization of power.² Like Vargas, the military sought to make regional elites subservient to a centralized government, closed Congress, and persecuted politicians.³ Unlike Vargas, however, whose Estado Novo had been an ad hoc solution, the military envisioned a profound transformation of politics. To key military figures, the Moreira Alves affair demonstrated that despite nearly five years of the

“Revolution,” politicians had learned nothing. The “Revolution” they had refused to accept voluntarily would now be imposed through military tutelage.

How long would this state of affairs last? Would the political class ever recover its power? Politicians found themselves in a frightening, uncertain world, where the foremost concern was surviving amid their drastically curtailed influence. Convincing the generals that they had learned their lesson became politicians’ best bet to get Congress reopened. For arenistas, the situation held opportunities: if and when institutional politics recommenced, the military would need trustworthy politicians who would make sure that a fiasco like the Moreira Alves case never happened again. In the MDB, meanwhile, politicians could only keep their heads down to avoid the personal and professional calamity of cassação.

Cassações were always justified by allegations of corruption or subversion. This fit perfectly with the belief, fundamental to military culture, that the Armed Forces were the guardians of Brazil’s morality.⁴ The military was thus well positioned (in their own minds) to punish “immoral” politicians, in a high-minded defense of the greater good. As Costa e Silva explained, “I have a strong sense of the moderation and experience necessary to evaluate what is sufficient to serve as an example. The punishment should never be applied to harm individuals but rather to defend the collectivity.”⁵ But in practice cassações were profoundly political, and corruption and subversion were often just excuses to rid the regime of recalcitrant politicians or even to settle personal vendettas.⁶ Whatever the precise motivations, what is most striking is that even in the wake of the betrayal represented by the Moreira Alves vote, with Congress closed and Costa e Silva ruling by decree, the generals in power still expected that if the worst troublemakers were removed the rest of the political class could be salvaged.

“THE RESUMPTION OF THE REVOLUTION”: THE AFTERMATH OF AI-5

Immediately, a wave of arrests swept up regime opponents, politicians among them. All indications are that the arrests were uncoordinated, ordered by local military commanders or police officials who targeted anyone deemed an enemy of the “Revolution.” Moreira Alves first hid in Campinas, in the home of MDB state deputy Francisco Amaral. He then moved to the apartment of federal deputy Pedroso Horta in São Paulo before slipping away to Chile.⁷ He later traveled to the United States, where he spoke to Latin Americanist scholars about Brazil’s repressive regime.⁸ Hermano Alves took refuge in the Mexican embassy before fleeing to Mexico, Algeria, France, and England, where he worked as a correspondent for *O Estado*.⁹

Some politicians who remained faced even more outrageous treatment. Guanabara’s former governor Carlos Lacerda, a member of the former UDN who had been one of the key planners of the coup, was arrested in Rio de Janeiro, as was

former president Kubitschek.¹⁰ Their crime was participation in the short-lived Frente Ampla (Broad Front), which, between late 1966 and its banning in early 1968, had called for the restoration of liberal democracy.¹¹ Within a few days, MDB deputies Henrique Henkin, Martins Rodrigues, and Paulo Campos and ARENA deputy José Carlos Guerra were arrested, and Covas and Righi were picked up soon after. Police stormed David Lerer’s apartment and beat him before hauling him to army police headquarters, where he spoke to Covas through a hole in the wall.¹² Hélio Navarro was taken to São Paulo DOPS headquarters to answer questions about antiregime statements and eventually served twenty-one months in prison.¹³ Journalists and editors who had criticized the regime were also detained.¹⁴

The ignominy of arrest notwithstanding, it was politicians’ and journalists’ class status and connections that could take the sharp edge off the repression. *Jornal do Brasil* executive Manoel do Nascimento Brito escaped arrest when he was tipped off by a military friend who spirited him away from his office before DOPS arrived to arrest him.¹⁵ The seventy-five-year-old lawyer Heráclito Sobral Pinto, who had opposed the regime from the beginning and defended its foes in legal proceedings, was arrested in Goiânia on December 14. The next day, he was taken to the barracks of the army police in Brasília, where he received visitors and spent the night in an apartment reserved for officers. On December 16, he was moved to the army police prison, where he, *Jornal do Brasil* correspondent Carlos Castello Branco, and four deputies were placed in unlocked cells and invited to dine with the officers.¹⁶ In response to an officer’s claim that AI-5 would establish “Brazilian-style democracy,” he supposedly retorted, “I’ve heard of Brazilian-style turkey but not Brazilian-style solutions. Democracy is universal, without adjectives.”¹⁷

Covas admitted that he was “flattered” by his treatment. On the way to prison the officers stopped so he could buy cigarettes, and in the car they praised him for his behavior in Congress. When he arrived at the same prison from which Sobral Pinto had been released the night before, the commander, who he had met when visiting deputies arrested earlier, greeted him with a shrug that said, “What can I do? You know my opinion of you.” In prison for only a week, he took meals with officers, and his wife brought him books, a chessboard, and newspapers.¹⁸ This was a far cry from the treatment lower-class Brazilians who ran afoul of the law received; despite their disdain for the political class, the military rarely subjected these white men to the torture or prolonged sentences reserved for leftist guerrillas, the poor, and the dark-skinned.

Still, politicians must have been infuriated as they watched colleagues forced to hide in embassies and apartments, former presidents and governors being arrested, and respected journalists being hauled off to jail. This was not how educated, cultured Brazilians were supposed to be treated. As Covas lamented in his handwritten prison diary, “The principal characteristic of this new coup was to attack honest men [*homens de bem*]. Neither subversion nor corruption can any

longer serve as an excuse. [Now they] simply [want] to get rid of men who are inclined to speak. Especially if they possess moral authority.”¹⁹

After five days, Covas was questioned. The thirty-question interrogation survived only because he was provided with an eleven-page typed transcript. While Covas suffered no physical mistreatment, the accusations must have been deeply offensive to a “public man.” The officers criticized him for his “notorious” ties to communists (and, by implication, being one himself) and supporting students’ attempts to launch a “revolutionary war.” They accused him of buying votes in his last electoral campaign, seeking to create “artificial crises” for political profit, and committing acts of ideological inconsistency.²⁰ Throughout the tone was accusatory and condescending. His questioners made mocking references to his intelligence:

Since you are such an intelligent man, with great mental agility, you couldn’t ignore that the lamentable events at the University of Brasília . . . were the result of causes that had long been agitating, demoralizing, and disturbing that university. . . . As leader of the MDB, . . . why didn’t you direct those you led to examine the preexisting causes that generated that situation instead of getting stuck on analyzing one episode?²¹

They accused him of supporting “enemies of the Revolution” by endorsing the Frente Ampla and associating himself with former president Jânio Quadros. “Doesn’t it appear to you that your attitude . . . is incompatible with the conduct that should be maintained by a parliamentarian whose duty it is to watch over the law and not disrespect it?”²²

This persecution brought to the fore the social ties that bound politicians together, including arenistas who lent support to arrested colleagues—a courageous gesture, since supporting someone out of favor with the regime could put one’s own career in jeopardy. During Covas’s days in prison, he received three notes signed by a total of twelve fellow MDB deputies; Rio de Janeiro deputy Adolfo de Oliveira included two sets of playing cards to help him pass the time.²³ Meanwhile fellow politicians, including arenistas like Alagoas senator Teotônio Vilela, rushed to his apartment so that Lila would not have to be alone.²⁴

If arrests, interrogations, and beatings terrified the political class, particularly members of the opposition or allies of Kubitschek, Lacerda, or Quadros, public statements from military figures blaming the political class for the regime’s dictatorial turn made things worse still. These statements were not mere rhetorical flourishes designed to intimidate politicians; comments made behind closed doors, where none but top military brass and civilian collaborators in the cabinet could hear, also blamed politicians for the crisis.

On December 13, as Costa e Silva prepared to sign AI-5, he called the National Security Council (CSN) to advise him, a meeting whose historical importance was so obvious that its audio was recorded. The CSN was made up of the president, vice president, a secretary general, the seventeen cabinet ministers, the head of the SNI, and the chiefs of staff of the Armed Forces branches. While most of

the cabinet ministers were civilians, only eight had ever held elected office. The remaining members held little sympathy for the politicians they now resolved to punish. Costa e Silva opened the two-hour meeting by framing the institutional act as the result of the Moreira Alves vote. “The government,” he complained, “counted on the comprehension of the public men of the country, who have as much responsibility as we do for the maintenance of peace, order, and public tranquility. . . . We counted on their clearly understanding that they could not collaborate with an aggression toward another area [the military], also responsible for the Revolution.” In Costa e Silva’s telling, he had displayed extraordinary patience, for without harmony between politicians and the military the country would be carried to “material, moral, and political disaggregation.” But they had repaid him with an act of “provocation,” proving that they aimed to block the “evolutionary process of the Revolution.”²⁵

MEDIA FILE 3. Clip of President Artur da Costa e Silva speaking to the CSN, December 13, 1968.

SOURCE: Recording of the 43rd Session of the CSN, <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/folha/treinamento/hotsites/ai5/reuniao/index.html>.



When Costa e Silva finished, he passed the microphone to each member of the CSN. Vice President Pedro Aleixo spoke first. A lawyer and former deputy from Minas Gerais, Aleixo expressed his opposition to the act in an almost pleading tone. He explained that it had been unrealistic to ask deputies to make a “political” decision to support the government over Moreira Alves while ignoring the case’s legal flaws. “The choice to send the case to the Supreme Court, from the legal point of view, does not seem to me to have been the most advisable one.” Perhaps Moreira Alves had committed slander; if so, the Chamber could have expelled him for violating parliamentary decorum.²⁶ Whatever its text might claim to the contrary, the act contained “absolutely nothing that . . . characterizes a democratic regime.” Why not start with something less drastic? “Understanding . . . all the high reasons of state that inspire you and the elaborators of this document, I very humbly, very modestly declare that if we have to take a step like this . . . I would start precisely with a state of siege.” If that proved ineffective the nation would understand the need for a new act. “I state this with the greatest respect, but certain that I am fulfilling a duty to myself, a duty to you . . . , a duty to the Council, and a duty to Brazil.”²⁷

MEDIA FILE 4. Clip of Vice President Pedro Aleixo speaking to the CSN, December 13, 1968.

SOURCE: Recording of the 43rd Session of the CSN, <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/folha/treinamento/hotsites/ai5/reuniao/index.html>.



The ministers of the navy and army scoffed at Aleixo's proposal. Navy Minister Augusto Rademaker retorted, "We don't have to debate this question juridically, legally, or constitutionally because the things that happened in Congress were not just words or offenses against a person; they were offenses against an institution." The Armed Forces had patiently attempted to resolve the problem through legal means, not repression, and what had it gotten them? "What needs to be done now is, in fact, a repression to end these situations that could carry the country not to a crisis, but to a chaos from which we won't be able to escape."²⁸ Army Minister Lyra Tavares pointedly stated, "If [Aleixo] had the responsibility to maintain this nation in order, he wouldn't get so stuck on extremely respectable texts of law." While the country was once again degenerating into subversion, politicians such as Moreira Alves were inciting the people against the Armed Forces. The military had waited patiently, "convinced . . . that there was no way there would not be a solution." Yet the Chamber had refused to acknowledge the attack on the military's honor or purge subversion from its own ranks.²⁹

MEDIA FILE 5. Clip of Navy Minister Augusto Rademaker speaking to the CSN, December 13, 1968.

SOURCE: Recording of the 43rd Session of the CSN, <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/folha/treinamento/hotsites/ais/reuniao/index.html>.



Civilian members of the CSN with no electoral or legal experience took the same position. Finance Minister Antônio Delfim Neto argued, "I believe that the Revolution, very early on, put itself in a straitjacket that impeded it from realizing its objectives." He explained that he was in "full agreement" with AI-5; "It doesn't go far enough," he stated, and argued that they should modify the act to grant Costa e Silva (and by extension himself) the authority to decree constitutional amendments to accelerate Brazil's development.³⁰ As an ambitious economist serving in the federal government for the first time, Delfim undoubtedly saw in AI-5 a chance to impose his own economic policies without congressional interference. It was a position he has maintained for the rest of his life; in our 2015 interview, he stated emphatically, "I signed it. And if conditions were the same, I would sign it again."³¹

CSN members with a background in electoral politics were more reluctant. Foreign Minister José de Magalhães Pinto, who as governor of Minas Gerais had led the 1964 conspiracy against Goulart in his state, admitted, "It is a terrible situation for all of us. When I took the responsibility to incite the movement [of 1964], I didn't feel as uneasy as I do now; however, I must say that I give all my solidarity . . . to the Revolution because . . . I do not want to see it lost."³² He struck the same tone a few days later with the Portuguese ambassador, saying he had experienced a "dilemma . . . between his democratic convictions and the necessity of impeding

the disaggregation of the Revolution, ultimately deciding in favor of the latter by supporting the institutional act. He did not regret it because the danger Brazil was running was incalculable.”³³

Labor Minister Jarbas Passarinho expressed similar unease: “I know that you loathe, as do I[,] . . . moving on the path toward a pure and simple dictatorship.” Still, he argued, the act was necessary. “But to hell with every scruple of conscience. . . . What matters now isn’t that democracy be defined just by the text of a constitution. What matters is that we have the historic courage to recover the [revolutionary] process.”³⁴ Strikingly, Passarinho, a former colonel who had entered politics after 1964 as appointed governor of his home state of Pará, expressed more unease with the act than Delfim Neto, a technocrat with no special attachment to democratic forms.

MEDIA FILE 6. Clip of Labor Minister Jarbas Passarinho speaking to the CSN, December 13, 1968.

SOURCE: Recording of the 43rd Session of the CSN, <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/folha/treinamento/hotsites/ai5/reuniao/index.html>.



Costa e Silva then summoned his justice minister. In a meeting that morning with Costa e Silva, the military ministers, the head of the SNI, and Rondon Pacheco, Gama e Silva had suggested a far more draconian act, causing Army Minister Lyra Tavares to protest, “Not like this Gama. This way, you’ll make a mess of the whole house.”³⁵ It was so excessive that Costa e Silva reputedly told a fellow general later, “If you had read that first one, you would have fallen to the floor. It was absurd. It would have closed Congress, made changes to the judicial branch, along with several other ferocious Nazi measures.”³⁶ Gama e Silva then presented a second draft, the one submitted to the CSN as AI-5. To explain the reasoning behind the act, he stated:

I cannot understand the behavior of the Chamber of Deputies, particularly the party . . . that wanted to call itself the “party of the Revolution,” as anything other than an authentic act of subversion. . . . The Revolution was made precisely . . . to impede subversion and ensure the democratic order. If this order is at risk, [we must] seek help from suitable revolutionary instruments to restore true, authentic democracy.³⁷

He rejected Aleixo’s call for a state of siege. AI-5 was “truly a measure of national salvation.” It was not dictatorial, because the man to whom it gave new powers was Costa e Silva, who “due to his attitudes, due to his deliberation, due to his equilibrium, and due to his patriotism” would never allow himself to act as a dictator. It had been a mistake to place a time limit on previous institutional acts, so this one should have no limit. “The Revolution limited itself, and the consequence is the self-destruction that people want to provoke within it now.”³⁸

The minutes and recording reveal two key points. First, AI-5 was a response to the behavior of Congress, not the student movement or the guerrilla struggle. Second, for both military and civilian CSN members, commitment to democracy lasted only until it proved inconvenient. Costa e Silva, Gama e Silva, and the others had little stake in preserving the constitution they themselves had established. Apart from Gama e Silva, they did possess a rhetorical attachment to liberal democracy, but their ideal was an authoritarian “democracy” defined by security and public order, not loyalty to legal texts. This understanding was even more limited than the elitist democracy propounded in the congressional debates over Moreira Alves. Certainly AI-5 flew in the face of the conception of democracy that Aleixo and Magalhães Pinto held, but this was not enough to convince them to challenge the military, which had even less compunction about discarding what remained of democracy. Even Aleixo’s opposition was qualified by his admission that if a constitutional state of siege proved ineffective, he would endorse a departure from legality. In the end, every member of the CSN, including Aleixo, signed AI-5. By signing the act, they placed a fig leaf of civilian endorsement over the military’s naked power grab.

These two points made in private—that the political class was to blame for the new act and that liberal “democracy” needed redefinition—were soon reinforced publicly. Late on December 13, as he prepared to read AI-5 over the air, Gama e Silva explained that while the “months of agitation” had caused concern, a new act was required only when agitation spread to Congress. “The revolutionary war . . . reached the very national parliament through the behavior of members of the party who had the responsibility to defend . . . the Revolution . . . , thus creating this climate of disquietude.”³⁹ The problem was not students, guerrillas, or even Moreira Alves but rather ARENA. Naturally, arenistas bristled at the claim that they were to blame. The next day, twenty-one ARENA senators (nearly a third of the Senate) signed a telegram decrying the act. “Since it is impossible to use the parliamentary lectern . . .” they wrote, “we manifest to you our disagreement with the solution adopted by the executive branch through AI-5.” The act represented a “political regression with unpredictable consequences,” and by warning Costa e Silva of the great responsibility he had assumed with such sweeping powers, they were “fulfilling a duty . . . imposed upon [them] by the popular representation with which [they] are invested.”⁴⁰ Senators were in the best position to oppose the act; other than Krieger, who had taken a public stand against the prosecution of Moreira Alves, they had nothing to do with the problem. The references to duty and their voters were a reminder that they were men of honor representing the Brazilian people.

Costa e Silva’s response two days later was deeply worrisome. In a terse reply that was not published in the press, the president wrote:

I should remind you that it was the lack of political party support . . . that led me to take the decision consolidated in AI-5. . . . I almost begged for the support

of my party in preserving . . . the Revolution. . . . This evolutionary process was disturbed by the lack of understanding of those who did not, perhaps, sincerely desire the rule of law. The revolutionary evolutionary process is thus suspended due to a lack of political support, due to the true hostility of the party that should have been the most interested in the prevalence of “juridical and social values,” which would only be truly valid without the demoralization and discrediting of the Armed Forces.⁴¹

The “revolutionary evolutionary process” referred to the regime’s evolution from arbitrary acts to legalized institutionalization, a process the constitution was to have consolidated. For Costa e Silva, politicians had shown that they had not truly accepted the necessary transformation of politics. As a result, the military would rule without them. The president offered this explanation publicly at a military graduation ceremony the same day. He claimed that those “defeated by [the Revolution of] March [1964]” were attempting to defame the “Revolution” and divide the military. “They warned the country about an inexistent militarism and blamed the military for the nation’s problems. They offended you, and when you become offended, they claimed you were pressuring the other branches of government.” In this version, Kubitschek, Lacerda, Goulart, and Moreira Alves had all been part of a fantastical plot to overthrow the “Revolution.” Yet as Costa e Silva stated, “The Revolution is irreversible,” and “whenever it is indispensable, like it is now, we will carry out new revolutions within the Revolution!” Politicians, particularly arenistas, had failed to recognize this.

The entire nation understood that the military could not accept . . . being dishonored with impunity as a class by an enormous insult that would receive the cowardly protection of immunity, which was never intended for such objectives. [The military] gave proof of its tolerance and democratic spirit, and instead of wrongly using the weapons the people entrusted to them, they sought the recourse granted by law. But unfortunately, they did not receive the . . . support of many deputies in the majority party. . . . The government was thus obliged to intervene and take strong measures that could reactivate the Revolution. This is why the new institutional act was approved.⁴²

The most ominous aspect of Costa e Silva’s response was its ambiguity. Phrases like “recovering the revolutionary process” hinted at an improvisational approach. If Costa e Silva hesitated to specify what this would look like, it was probably because he was under pressure from the military to come down hard on the political class and did not know how far the punishment would go. Might Congress and state legislatures be closed permanently? Might the military decide that the time had come not simply for the reform of politics, but for their end?

Hints of the pressure Costa e Silva faced came in the form of pronouncements from high-ranking officers. The harshest indictment came from General Henrique de Assunção Cardoso, First Army chief of staff, in a remarkable speech at a command transfer ceremony:

Almost five years escaped without the political class taking advantage of the opportunity March 31 offered them. . . . At first they were remissive, and later they made themselves accomplices of the open enemies of the Revolution. . . .

Except for the patriotic exceptions of a few . . . , the sad truth is that the majority of them have never accomplished anything tangible or sincere. . . . [They] persevered in sullyng the already precarious reputation of the legislative branch, particularly with reference to the abuse of their prerogatives and the ostentatious and scandalous enjoyment of innumerable privileges and advantages.

Civilian leaders were never so far removed from reality; they never showed themselves more incapable; they never betrayed so shamelessly the most basic principles of the fight against corruption and subversion.

December 13 marked, however, the resumption of the Revolution. . . . [T]he political class has forgotten nothing and learned nothing. The traitorous vote of the Chamber of Deputies was not an alienation or a mistake! It was a pure and simple attempt to return to the past, a tacit revocation of the Revolution.⁴³

Such comments targeted not merely “subversives” or renegade arenistas, but the entire political class; they drew on broad disgust with politicians common across Brazilian society. For a significant swath of the Armed Forces, the Moreira Alves case proved what they had long suspected: despite four years of “Revolution,” the political class was more interested in protecting its perks than in the good of the nation. Their shortsighted behavior had held Brazil back for too long. As the military saw it, the time had come to put them in their place.

This opinion was not just a tool of intimidation. The same attitude was manifested privately in São Paulo in October by officers attending a birthday party for an air force officer. The invitees included a US consular officer; a few judges, lawyers, and businessmen; and “hard-line” officers. In a far-reaching conversation about politics, several invitees agreed that the military was “the first lady of the nation”—a curious feminization but one that accurately reflected their understanding of the support the military should provide the executive branch. Although by this time over three hundred politicians had been cassado under AI-5, they believed that to continue the “goals of the Revolution,” still more cassações were necessary, along with the temporary closure of all state legislatures and municipal councils. In their ideal scenario, all candidates would have to be “approved by a board or court designed to judge the candidates’ fitness.” According to the US consular officer, their ideology was based on two principles: “the current crop of Brazilian politicians was unworthy of trust”; and “the responsibility for setting things right in Brazil rested with the Armed Forces.”⁴⁴ Still, it is significant that even these “radicals” did not advocate the permanent closure of Congress or other legislatures; despite everything, they believed that civilian politicians were needed to rule Brazil (under military tutelage) and that if the bad apples could be eliminated, the rest might be salvaged.

In the face of discouraging public military comments, politicians were at a loss as to how to minimize the threat that lay on the horizon. What was

certain was that even before Congress could be reopened new cassações would come. Their responses had to take this into account, for being removed from office, their political rights suspended for a decade, would be devastating not only politically but also financially and socially. For an arenista, particularly one who had voted against the government in the Moreira Alves case, was it safest to enthusiastically praise AI-5? Or was it wiser to lie low? For the MDB, was cassação likely enough that one should boldly speak out and go out in a final blaze of glory? Or might silence enable one to escape?

Politicians' responses thus ran the gamut from forceful condemnation to fawning adulation. It was only a courageous few who opted for the former route. In addition to helping draft the December 14 telegram criticizing the act, Krieger took the bold step on January 5 of submitting to Costa e Silva his resignation as Senate majority leader and president of ARENA, explaining that he had made this decision in November due to his disagreement over the Moreira Alves case.⁴⁵ Indeed, in the coming months, Krieger's name was brought up in rumors about who might be purged.⁴⁶ Minas Gerais senator Milton Campos, an early supporter of the coup and Castelo Branco's justice minister, issued a statement that surprisingly escaped the press censors: "With this act, we now live under a state of fact, which has substituted the rule of law. . . . I only have words to lament what has occurred and to express my inconformity."⁴⁷

Most members of the MDB opted for a cautious approach. Deputy Jorge Cury urged the collective resignation of all MDB legislators, and other oppositionists called for the party to dissolve itself.⁴⁸ Yet the most the party did was issue a statement arguing that Brazil's "liberal traditions are disesteemed by the immoderation of arbitrary [actions], which are also incompatible with the institutional and historical destiny of the Armed Forces."⁴⁹ Most MDB politicians chose to "wait and see with passive acceptance of [a] situation in which [there is] no role for [the] opposition."⁵⁰ If there was a behind-the-scenes power struggle between "radical" and "moderate" military factions, it was prudent to keep quiet and hope the latter won.⁵¹

The attitudes of Krieger and Campos notwithstanding, most of ARENA chose to cheer the act. The governors of São Paulo, Minas Gerais, Guanabara, Paraíba, and Rio Grande do Sul called Costa e Silva to "applaud the decision of the government and define it as courageous and necessary to contain the agitation that was trying to demoralize the revolution of 1964 and impede the country's progress." Ten other governors sent telegrams to express their approval.⁵² They had good reason to do so; after all, the governors of Guanabara and Minas Gerais were both allies of Kubitschek, and both had to be concerned that they were now targets for cassação.⁵³ São Paulo's Sodr e had at times run afoul of the generals, and there were whispers that he could be cassado as well.⁵⁴ Yet he still maintained dreams of succeeding Costa e Silva, which would surely come to naught if he delayed in endorsing the act.⁵⁵

Some legislators were also quick to express their support, perhaps attempting to outdo governors who were rivals back home. Paraná's Alípio de Carvalho, a retired general and ARENA federal deputy, praised AI-5 for "stopping the process of disintegration that was once again taking over Brazil" and pledged his support for the "Revolution's" "great task of cleansing and restoration."⁵⁶ On December 26, thirty-four of ARENA's forty-two senators sent a new telegram responding to Costa e Silva's reply to the December 14 telegram. This time the senators expressed confidence in Costa e Silva and his desire for good relations with politicians, who sought only to offer their service to the "Revolution."⁵⁷ This second telegram was spearheaded by Piauí senator Petrônio Portella and Rio Grande do Norte senator Dinarte Mariz, while Krieger and several other signatories of the first telegram refused to sign. Thirteen senators signed both, considering it possible both to oppose AI-5 and to support Costa e Silva against "radical" officers. Still, the US ambassador derisively wrote of the double signatories, "Most of them stand for absolutely nothing and are notable only for their well developed instinct to survive." Indeed, it was rumored that some in the military wanted the thirteen double signatories to be cassado, not so much because they opposed AI-5, which was to be expected from politicians, but because their willingness to sign both documents seemed to be a symptom of the lack of principle that the military was seeking to eradicate from the political class.⁵⁸ As he read the papers in prison, Covas fumed:

It is such a totality of announcements saying the same thing that you start to get the impression that someone agrees with this. Alípios, Zezinhos, Geraldos, and other less cited scoundrels, how arrogantly they prepare themselves, assiduously attempting to discover the will of those in power. And how quickly the *camarilla* of governors expresses its solidarity in order to hold onto their jobs.⁵⁹

Behind the scenes, however, politicians were stunned. American diplomats who spoke with them described their mood as "shock and depression," "hopelessness," "deep despair," "apprehension," "cynicism," "uncertain[ty] and fearful[ness]," "gloom and tension," and "dismay and pessimism," all informed by "self-preservation and financial self-interest" and the conviction "that military men are bent upon destroying rather than punishing or reforming the 'political class.'"⁶⁰ Still, few were willing to express this publicly. The criteria for cassações were so obscure that with nearly everyone's future in doubt, any criticism might tip the balance. Arenistas in particular had cause for anger, since many had helped bring about the "Revolution," served the government faithfully (in their view), and now witnessed Congress closed and their paychecks suspended for their trouble. Despite his public praise, Alípio de Carvalho confided to a diplomat that he would never have voted to prosecute Moreira Alves if he had known this would happen and that it would be hard to remain in ARENA after this.⁶¹ In public, Carvalho, a career soldier who only entered politics in 1966, toed the party line. Yet he showed a different side in private, one that looked more like a politician than an officer.

“YOU BECOME A LEPER”:
PURGING THE POLITICAL CLASS

On December 30, the first of what would become twelve lists of purges was released. Politicians were not only removed from office; in most cases, their right to run for office, join political parties, or even vote was suspended for ten years. Although cassação had been an accepted way since the 1930s to rid the state of troublesome (usually leftist) politicians, the suspension of political rights, with its frontal attack on civil liberties, was an innovation of the military dictatorship. Between December 1968 and October 1969, 335 current or former senators, federal and state deputies, mayors, and municipal councilors were removed—nearly three-fifths of the total purged during military rule.⁶² The repression was targeted at the industrialized South and Southeast, above all, São Paulo, Guanabara, Rio de Janeiro, Rio Grande do Sul, and Minas Gerais. The northeastern state of Pernambuco, a hotbed of union and leftist mobilization, was also hit hard, and no state escaped unscathed, but of the 335 politicians affected, 175 (52.2 percent) came from these five states. These states, especially São Paulo, were the center of opposition to the regime, and nearly half of paulista federal deputies fell.

Despite the fact that Gama e Silva had privately recommended the removal of forty-four deputies, the first list contained only thirteen names.⁶³ Moreira Alves, Hermano Alves, Lerer, Righi, and seven other outspoken deputies were expelled from Congress—a development that surprised none of them since several were imprisoned at the time.⁶⁴ Lacerda, the right-wing former governor of Guanabara, had his political rights suspended too, the clearest example of how the regime had alienated its allies. Lacerda had long-standing presidential aspirations; when Costa e Silva was chosen to succeed Castelo Branco, he broke with the regime. His rejection of the “Revolution” was one of the most painful betrayals the regime suffered, and it is unsurprising that the military responded by suspending his political rights.⁶⁵ These thirteen would become the first group of many. While Costa e Silva emphasized at the first CSN meeting, “We are not talking about an actual court,” the proceedings would in theory be based on evidence gathered by the SNI.⁶⁶ But although the SNI was indeed building dossiers, “evidence” consisted largely of comments even more innocuous than the Moreira Alves speeches, and the accused had no right to defense. Like the words *revolution* and *democracy*, the concept of due process was redefined to fit the needs of a regime supposedly threatened by subversion. Legal standards of evidence only distracted from the “more important” concern: national security.

Over the next ten months, new lists appeared about once a month. A “no” vote in the Moreira Alves case was not enough to condemn anyone by itself. Although half of ARENA federal deputies had refused to support the government then, only 7.7 percent were purged, while 33.8 percent of MDB deputies met the same fate.⁶⁷ More important factors included belonging to the “radical” faction of the MDB,

membership in the now-banned Frente Ampla, and alleged communist sympathies. Accusations of corruption, moral failures, or personal enmity with a member of the CSN could also be damning but were often ignored if a politician was obedient. The real criteria were criticism of the regime or regular votes against it in Congress. Of the ARENA deputies who most frequently voted against the government, 42.9 percent were cassado, while only 0.5 percent of those who most frequently voted with the government were removed; in the MDB, 45 percent of the most consistent opponents of the regime were cassado, while none of the least combative were.⁶⁸ As Costa e Silva stated about one of those removed, “He’s been systematically against the government, and this is a bad example. If we should or want—and I still don’t know if we do—to rebuild the political structure of the country, we need to eliminate these elements.”⁶⁹

Initially the lists focused on Congress. Purgés were widened later to include state and local politicians. With input from military leaders, Gama e Silva would create a preliminary list of targets, with a dossier on each. The dossier contained information the security and information services had cobbled together from a variety of sources. First came legislative speeches, then newspaper columns or interviews, and finally information from the regime’s intelligence services, including statements at rallies and meetings with politicians who were enemies of the regime or had themselves been purged. Gama e Silva then selected names to forward to Costa e Silva, who read the dossiers and decided what punishment if any he felt was appropriate. He then submitted his final list to the CSN. Usually the CSN ratified his decisions. A few times they convinced him to spare someone. Sometimes they debated lightening the penalty by not suspending someone’s political rights, and in still other cases they persuaded Costa e Silva to increase the penalty (suspension of political rights when he had proposed only cassação).⁷⁰

The process was seldom straightforward, and vendettas could weigh as heavily as supposed subversion or corruption, both of which were often simply a convenient excuse to sideline an adversary. In the December 30 CSN meeting, Passarinho defended MDB deputy José Lurtz Sabiá, arguing that while he was prone to making violent criticisms of government ministers, that did not justify cassação. Moreover, Passarinho pointed out that Sabiá had defended foreign investment in Brazil—hardly something one would expect of a “subversive.” Some of Sabiá’s most vicious attacks had been directed at Gama e Silva, and cassação could cast doubt on whether AI-5’s purpose was to punish subversion and corruption or to settle scores.⁷¹

A few months before, Gama e Silva had confided to Krieger that he was considering prosecuting Sabiá for slandering him.⁷² Now, however, he claimed that “problems of a personal nature were not taken into consideration” but that Sabiá “did not show interest in preserving the Revolution. . . . We aren’t just talking about agitation, subversion, or corruption, since the Revolution seeks the implantation of an authentic democracy in the country. This deputy . . . is completely

incompatible with the democratic regime that [the Revolution] wants to establish in Brazil.⁷³ The health minister, who Sabiá had also criticized, added that he needed to be removed due to "his lack of decorum and personal dignity in attacking indiscriminately someone he doesn't even know."⁷⁴ Personal attacks (or anti-regime statements) were thus recast as "antirevolutionary" rhetoric. As Costa e Silva put it in another CSN meeting, "Every time a deputy attacks the regime . . . he turns himself into an enemy of the Revolution."⁷⁵

This became clearer as succeeding lists were released. The January 16 list contained names of individuals who were neither blatantly corrupt nor antirevolutionary, including the six São Paulo arenistas who had signed manifestos explaining their "no" vote in the Moreira Alves case. Costa e Silva argued that their votes had been merely the latest in a string of failings. The justification for removing Hary Normanton was almost certainly his ties to organized labor as former president of the São Paulo railroad workers' union, as the military frequently conflated trade unions with communism. Although Normanton had once supported Ademar de Barros in his crusade to reduce communist influence in the paulista labor movement, Costa e Silva now falsely claimed that he was "known to be a card-carrying communist, who we now have the chance to eliminate from politics."⁷⁶ As for Marcos Kertzmann, "He's been disloyal to ARENA," Costa e Silva griped. "Always against, always against." He had "disobeyed party instructions in many votes important for the government" and had worked with labor unions; these offenses showed that he was "an opportunist and a demagogue." To add insult to injury, he had allegedly attended a December 12 party held at a Brasília hotel to celebrate the refusal to grant permission to try Moreira Alves.⁷⁷ Both were removed from office and had their political rights suspended.

Israel Novaes had, among other alleged "sins," called for investigations of torture, belonged to an organization expressing sympathy for Cuba, and collaborated with the student movement. "He's been disloyal to his party; he's against everything," Costa e Silva grumbled. When Aleixo pressed Costa e Silva to specify what behavior had been so objectionable, the president retorted, "His behavior has been against the Revolution." Yet after Passarinho admitted that Novaes had written the preface for his forthcoming book and half-jokingly expressed worry that this could provoke the information services to open a file on him, Costa e Silva simply removed him from office without suspending his political rights.⁷⁸ The same penalty was applied to the other three deputies who had signed the manifesto, whose similarly trivial sins included supposedly attempting to bribe Costa e Silva with a watch to be taken on a state visit and becoming intoxicated at receptions.⁷⁹ The "Revolution" was turning on its own supporters, politicians who initially supported it but grew disillusioned when they realized that the military intended a far more sweeping reform of the political system than they envisioned.

Yet the case that generated the most intense debate was that of Mário Covas. "He is a young man who I know personally, to whom I've taken a liking, but who

has gone too far,” Costa e Silva said, proposing that he be cassado but without a suspension of his political rights.⁸⁰ Aleixo argued that even this was too harsh, reminding Costa e Silva that as leader of the MDB in the Chamber, Covas was obligated to attack the government: “If a measure of this nature is taken against the leader of the opposition party, we will almost be establishing a criterion that no one will be able to exercise a leadership position.”⁸¹ Once again Aleixo sought to lend a lawyer’s and politician’s perspective to a CSN dominated by military officers and civilian technocrats. And, as they frequently did, the officers and technocrats dismissed his arguments.

Gama e Silva and Delfim Neto, both paulistas who stood to profit if the up-and-coming Covas were removed from the picture, argued strenuously in favor of a suspension of political rights. Delfim Neto admitted that Covas was not a communist but argued that his “very active participation” in the “socialist movement in São Paulo” was what had gotten him elected leader of the MDB to begin with.⁸² Gama e Silva went further, arguing that Covas was guilty of “communist activity in the Santos region.” “His statements against the regime, his actions against the Revolution, are as frank, loyal, and sincere as it is possible for them to be.” He made a point of stating that Covas’s inclusion had not been his idea but that he received recommendations from the military—a clear reminder that he had military backing.⁸³

The entreaties of Gama e Silva and Delfim Neto notwithstanding, the president still wished to decree only Covas’s removal from office. “He is a man who can still be recovered for national politics,” the president said.⁸⁴ However, the navy minister now pointed out that with a simple removal from office, Covas would be able to run again in 1974. (The law governing eligibility to hold office stated that anyone removed from office, even without suspension of political rights, would be unable to run for office for two years, which would prevent Covas from running in 1970.) The year 1974 was the same one that the politicians whose political rights had been suspended in 1964—most notably, Brizola, Kubitschek, Quadros, and Goulart—would be eligible again. More fundamentally, AI-1 and AI-2 had not gone far enough; this time it was necessary to eliminate anyone who stood in the way of the “Revolution.” The navy minister argued, “I think it’s preferable to err through excess by eliminating these people. . . . We have to tighten the net, because any elements that we spare now will be a threat tomorrow.”⁸⁵ The army minister added that the continued presence of politicians like Covas would hamper the “implantation of Brazilian democracy, free from disorder and strikes.”⁸⁶ Finally, the chief of staff of the Armed Forces added, “If we conserve the possibility for this man to be a leader . . . , he will be highly pernicious for the Revolution.”⁸⁷

Facing the pressure of the military members of the CSN, Costa e Silva agreed to a ten-year suspension of political rights for Covas. Yet even as he removed him from politics for a decade, the president qualified that he saw Covas as “intelligent, well spoken, and appearing to be sincere in his convictions.” The paulista deputy

had come to visit him three times before his election as president, supposedly resisting Costa e Silva's entreaties to win him to the “Revolution” by arguing (in Costa e Silva's paraphrase), “I know you're trying to convert me, but I can't come over to your side because I need my constituency to be reelected, and my constituency isn't on your side.”⁸⁸ It was probably because he knew Covas so well, Costa e Silva admitted, that he felt such reluctance. As the former industry and commerce secretary Paulo Egydio Martins recalled years later, when he was in Castelo Branco's cabinet and Covas was an MDB vice-leader in the Chamber, they would have lunch together every couple of weeks, causing quite a commotion among the regime's intelligence services.⁸⁹ Attention to building cordial relationships immune to political disagreement nearly saved Covas from having his political rights suspended.

On occasion the CSN targeted a politician as a result of accusations of serious moral failure. The SNI file on a federal deputy from Alagoas accused of multiple homicides stated, “The fact that he has fled the justice system, shielded by his parliamentary immunities, contradicts the moralizing spirit of the Revolution.” Costa e Silva said, “The question we should be answering is the following: Is this man . . . worthy of belonging to Congress?”⁹⁰ A substitute deputy was accused of seducing five girls as young as fourteen with promises of marriage or financial benefits, abandoning them, and then bribing the families to drop charges. He was also accused of killing the brother of a victim, who attempted to kill him for destroying his sister's honor. Although Aleixo pointed out that “he is as revolutionary as it is possible to imagine,” this could not save him in light of these accusations.⁹¹

These examples illustrate how removal from office was based on a conjuncture of factors. While “subversion” was often important, it became more dangerous if one had upset a member of the military or the CSN, if one's removal could further the political aspirations of a member of the CSN, or, above all, if one had voted systematically and publicly against the government. On occasion, moral failings could be so severe that even support for the “Revolution” could not save a politician. On still other occasions, the military might be responding to the pressure of allied politicians seeking to remove rivals. “Everyone wanted to get rid of their competitors,” Delfim Neto recalled years later.⁹² Regime figures were aware that the justifications were tenuous. A Costa e Silva aide told a US diplomat that Covas was *cassado* for accepting money from a tax-evading tobacco company to make congressional speeches on its behalf. The embassy promptly reviewed congressional records and found no speeches by Covas on the company's behalf and correctly concluded that his removal was due to “political considerations.”⁹³

As the regime neared the end of its housecleaning of Congress in February, the time arrived for the second phase of its punishment of the political class, which would focus on state legislatures, municipal councils, and civil servants. The first step took place at the end of the February 7 CSN meeting, when Costa e Silva announced the indefinite recess of the legislative assemblies of five states. Chief

among these legislatures' sins had been the calling of excessive extraordinary sessions, for which they received salary bonuses—up to seventy such sessions in sixty-six hours.⁹⁴ As Costa e Silva remarked with satisfaction, the withholding of state deputies' salaries during the recesses would more than make up for all the bonuses; perhaps this would serve as a warning to the remaining seventeen legislatures, "so they can behave better."⁹⁵

Now the process for purging politicians shifted slightly. Since state and local politicians were largely unknown to the SNI, local military commanders and SNI agents prepared dossiers for review by "higher echelons" (presumably military commanders and Gama e Silva).⁹⁶ Yet since officers stationed in far-flung regions might not know local politics well, the process often began with recommendations from local politicians, who might use their advice to settle vendettas.⁹⁷ For example, in August a Bolívar Poeta de Siqueira, vice-president of the local ARENA directorate in the São Paulo town of Penápolis, sent a letter to Costa e Silva, Gama e Silva, and the ARENA national directorate accusing local members of a rival ARENA faction of misdeeds against the "Revolution," including defecting to the MDB when their candidate lost the 1968 mayoral elections, only to return to ARENA a few months later. Since the state directorate had proved impervious to his pleas, Siqueira begged the president and justice minister to remove them from office.⁹⁸

The influence of local rivalries is clear in the case of the mayor-elect of Covas's hometown of Santos, Esmeraldo Tarquínio. Voted state deputy of the year by journalists in 1968 for his conscientious representation of working-class people, there was not a whisper of corruption against him. Federal deputy Sabiá later referred to him as "a serious, public, Black, upstanding man who was easy to get along with."⁹⁹ Yet a general had never forgiven him for a few speeches he had given criticizing the government, and he had been photographed by DOPS at a student march; the US consulate in São Paulo had also heard that the white Santos political elite could not countenance the idea of a Black mayor and had lobbied for his cassação.¹⁰⁰ None of these reasons appear explicitly in the CSN minutes, but the evidence indicates that the US sources were correct. For example, Tarquínio's file contained all the usual alleged offenses: expressing sympathy for Fidel Castro, inciting strikes, and receiving electoral support from communists. He was also accused of having called the army a racist institution. A terse statement from the São Paulo DOPS summarized the intelligence services' view: "Communist. Antirevolutionary."¹⁰¹ But the file contained no actual evidence of communism, and "antirevolutionary" could be applied to many politicians who escaped. Before Costa e Silva pronounced sentence, Army Minister Lyra Tavares interjected that he had recently been in Santos, where Tarquínio's "aggressions" against the Armed Forces had led the army garrison there to request his removal.¹⁰² It is not difficult to imagine that Santos politicians who resented Tarquínio's outsider status as a working-class Afro-Brazilian might have brought his "aggressive" comments to the attention of friends in the local garrison.¹⁰³

Something similar happened on April 29, when the fifth list revoked the political rights of 174 people. Although several faced undocumented claims of being “corrupt and a corruptor,” they were by no means the most notoriously corrupt legislators. However, two paulistas were closely tied to the governor, Sodré.¹⁰⁴ One, João Mendonça Falcão, was his chosen leader of ARENA in the legislative assembly, and the other was a close friend; rumor had it that the governor broke down in tears at news of their cassação. To make matters worse, Costa e Silva had refused to even consult Sodré about the selection of a new mayor for the city of São Paulo. (Costa e Silva’s choice was a family friend, Paulo Maluf, a Lebanese-Brazilian businessman.) Some political observers speculated that all this may have been an attempt to embarrass Sodré into resigning.¹⁰⁵ Ultimately, as the stories of Tarquínio’s and Sodré’s allies indicate, petty personal rivalries or the desire to put a prominent ally in his place could make a target of an otherwise upstanding or unthreatening politician. To be clear, while leftist sympathies or alleged corruption factored into the regime’s decisions, they tended to function more as justifications; the real reasons involved personal rivalries or a history of voting against the government.

If for the regime this process was a way to purify the political class while ridding itself of troublesome opponents, it looked very different for those who were targeted. On the one hand, being cassado for standing up to a dictatorial regime could be a badge of pride. As Léo de Almeida Neves put it when asked if he had worried that he might lose his seat in Congress, “No, I wanted it. We [opposition] deputies hoped we would be cassado.”¹⁰⁶ But this affirmation of their honor and the recognition of their resistance were the only bright spots for most, for whom cassação could mean exile or loss of friends, prestige, jobs, or income. Others, like Moreira Alves, Hermano Alves, and others of the regime’s most vocal critics remained in exile for up to a decade.

Those who stayed in Brazil perhaps wished they had not. Righi was arrested several times over the next two years. Sometimes he was treated well; during his August 1969 arrest, when he was held in Santos with Tarquínio, they were allowed to play pool in the officers’ break room. Other times were more stressful; once he was taken to São Paulo in an unmarked black van, to the infamous headquarters of DOI-CODI (Department of Information Operations—Center for Internal Defense Operations) on Rua Tutóia, where some of the most gruesome torture of regime opponents took place. “It’s very hard to describe how we felt right then. You have the impression that this isn’t really happening. It is so intense. You are worried about yourself, your family, your affairs, about what could happen, if those guys might beat you up, put you on the ‘parrot’s perch,’ kill you,” he told me in 2015. Arrest was also hard on one’s family. After one of his arrests, Righi’s wife, Luciene, seven months pregnant, gave birth to a stillborn son, which she attributed to the extreme stress she suffered during his eight-day imprisonment when she had no idea whether he was dead or alive.¹⁰⁷ When Covas was arrested again in 1969, Lila, terrified that he would disappear, frantically called everyone she could think

of to try to discover where he was being held. In the end, it was Paulo Maluf, the newly appointed mayor of São Paulo and a personal friend of Costa e Silva, who discovered Covas's whereabouts from military contacts and passed the information to Lila¹⁰⁸

Even for those who were cassado but not arrested, there were psychological, social, professional, and financial repercussions. For many, politics had been their life; when that arbitrarily ended, it was profoundly traumatic. On the day that Almir Turisco d'Araújo was cassado, his family sat with him by the radio; when he heard his name listed, "devastated," he retreated to the bathroom to cry in privacy.¹⁰⁹ "Politics [were] the only stimulus that completely mobilized [Cunha Bueno's] personality," his biographer wrote. "To place himself outside of it, . . . and above all having been punished by the very system he helped establish, shook him to the marrow."¹¹⁰ As Lila Covas remembered, "I tried many ways to cheer [Mário] up. However, he became very embittered without politics. He grew ever more withdrawn."¹¹¹

One bright spot was the solidarity of friends and colleagues. Juracy Magalhães, a former general, federal deputy, senator, and governor of Bahia who had served in Castelo Branco's cabinet, wrote to Cunha Bueno, "I know your character, and I know that you will not be tormented by the punishment you have received. Such are the vicissitudes of those who serve the people."¹¹² Cunha Bueno also received a letter from General Olympio Mourão Filho, an architect of the coup who later diverged from Castelo Branco and Costa e Silva over how authoritarian the regime should become. The general wrote, "I still have not recovered from the astonishment your cassação caused me. It is a shame that our country is in this type of situation, without full rights for even those who signed onto your decapitation. Tomorrow they may be victims of the same guillotine."¹¹³ When Sabiá was cassado, his arenista friend Gilberto Azevedo gave him a hug and confided that his fellow *paraense* (Pará resident) Passarinho had defended him before the CSN.¹¹⁴

Still, friends had to be careful, lest their gestures of support make them a target. When Maluf found out Covas's whereabouts for Lila, he did so on the condition that she not reveal where she had gotten the information.¹¹⁵ Cassado politicians understood the difficulties their friendship could cause colleagues. As Covas recalled, "It creates a bit of embarrassment, it makes you police yourself a lot, because you always think that if you go to a meeting of politicians who are still active, it looks like you are refusing to 'leave this world.'"¹¹⁶ Invitations to cocktail parties, dinners at upscale Brasília restaurants, and calls from foreign diplomats were all curtailed, or ceased altogether. Lila Covas remembered, "Many people who had called themselves our friends distanced themselves from us. I remember well people who would cross the street because they were afraid to greet anyone in my family. Many would dissemble and pretend they didn't know us."¹¹⁷ Amaury Müller, who was purged seven years later, recalled, "It was without a doubt the most traumatic experience of my life. . . . Back then a politician who had been

cassado was a sort of leper, from whom many people fled or kept a safe distance.”¹¹⁸ Removal from office also ruined public reputations cultivated over decades; the city of Adamantina added insult to injury when it renamed an avenue bearing Cunha Bueno’s name.¹¹⁹

Without their old salaries and generous benefits, the cassados were forced to seek other means of support. The day after his removal from Congress, Cunha Bueno took out a newspaper ad alerting readers that he was reopening his law practice after a twenty-two-year hiatus.¹²⁰ After being released from prison in 1970, Hélio Navarro began working as a lawyer for political prisoners, a profession in which he was joined in 1972 by Righi, who had spent much of the previous three years at the University of São Paulo earning graduate degrees in economic, financial, and commercial law.¹²¹ Still, this was a precarious way to make a living, as political prisoners’ families were often already in dire financial straits because of legal expenses or perhaps because other members of the family had themselves been targeted by the regime and lost jobs; Righi took most such cases pro bono.¹²² Tarquínio, former mayor-elect of Santos, had a hard time attracting clients when he tried to return to law. He found a job in broadcasting, but the offer was withdrawn after military officials informed the station that it would be inappropriate for a purged politician to appear on radio or TV. After being released from military custody in December, Lerer accepted a scholarship offer abroad, but when he tried to leave Brazil, he was detained at the airport and his passport confiscated. He had been a civil servant before becoming a deputy, but on being removed from office he was fired and lost his retirement benefits. He then sought to return to his profession as a doctor but found that employers were afraid to hire him. He eventually found a job via an informal arrangement with another doctor; Lerer did all his work and received part of his salary, without appearing on the payroll.¹²³

Even if one was lucky enough to gain employment, removal from politics complicated life in innumerable other ways. Covas was shocked to discover that he would no longer be allowed to have an account at the state-run Banco do Brasil. To get a business loan, he had to become creative. When he wanted to invest in real estate in São Vicente, he approached his boyhood friend Paulo Egydio Martins, former minister of industry and commerce under Castelo Branco, who was currently working as president of a real estate credit bank. Although Martins had supported the regime from the beginning, he granted the loan and even served as the guarantor.¹²⁴ With money tight, Covas’s wife had to let their maid go and take their children out of private school, and she began to sew and sell clothes to bring in extra income.¹²⁵ Together such problems further isolated cassado politicians, who, unless they were independently wealthy, might find themselves deprived of some of the perks that went with their former status.

Nonetheless, some did find ways to dabble in politics. While suspension of political rights prevented a politician from running for office, their family members could run, and several politicians immediately set about getting relatives

elected to replace them. Before AI-5 a common approach was to ask one's wife to run for office, but all the wives elected to Congress were cassada in late 1969. While the generals hesitated to eliminate someone from politics due to family ties, their conviction that women deputies were merely their husbands' mouthpieces won out. Indeed, their dossiers provided little evidence of subversion, none of corruption, and scant examples of antiregime statements, but they did invariably highlight the men to whom they were married.¹²⁶ Three days after the removal of the last wife of a purged politician, the regime decreed that the spouse of anyone punished by an institutional act was now ineligible to run for office.¹²⁷ Yet enterprising politicians simply turned to getting their sons elected. This was a natural next step, since membership in the political class was often, although not exclusively, hereditary; this strategy simply meant that the son's political career would begin sooner than expected. In 1972, twenty-three-year-old Jorge Orlando Carone, son of Nisia Carone, ran successfully for city councilor; in 1974 he was elected to the Minas legislative assembly. His younger brother Antônio was elected to the council in 1976. After Cunha Bueno was cassado, his son Antônio Henrique was promptly elected to the state legislature in 1970. Sons never faced the scrutiny that wives did, and there does not appear to have been any discussion of making them ineligible. For the military, sons were capable of independent political action, while wives were not.

“ZEAL FOR THE COLLECTIVE INTEREST”: RESHAPING THE POLITICAL CLASS THROUGH REFORM

Though sporadic cassações would continue until October, by the end of May, 259 of the 335 politicians (77.3 percent) who were cassado in 1968–69 had been removed. At this point, the “reactivation of the Revolution” shifted from exception to normalization. This had not always been a foregone conclusion. Passarinho recalled later that there was military pressure to close Congress permanently, “because the act, above all, was a punishment applied to Congress.”¹²⁸ Gama e Silva claimed in a meeting with ARENA leadership that he had pressed Costa e Silva to dissolve Congress altogether.¹²⁹ Senator Filinto Müller told an American diplomat that Delfim Neto and Planning Minister Hélio Beltrão concurred, since they found it easier to carry out their functions without congressional interference. The president had rejected this idea.¹³⁰ Yet much remained uncertain. As Costa e Silva mentioned in the March CSN meeting, “Of course we’ll have political reopening . . . , but when, how, and where, I still don’t know. . . . Reopening depends on various provisions, including reforms.”¹³¹ “Reforms” referred to constitutional changes that would formalize military tutelage of politics. The Spanish ambassador summarized, “What the government and Revolution hope . . . is that along with the legal and constitutional reforms, ARENA reforms its mentality. And its leaders believe that after everything that has happened . . . , politicians will have grasped the true national reality, which they will not be permitted to contest at any moment.”¹³²

The first reform came in late May, when Costa e Silva decreed a complementary act ordering party reorganization. Previously, local, state, and national party directorates had been organized from the top down; that is, prominent national politicians would maneuver to get their allies placed on state directorates, whose members in turn sought to influence municipal directorates. The new act reversed the process, ordering reorganization from the bottom up, whereby local party members would elect a directorate. Delegates from municipal directorates would select a state directorate, with the process repeating itself at the national level. Potentially, the new procedures could facilitate the “renovation” of politics, with leaders with a base of local support undermining entrenched politicians at the state and national levels. A provision requiring parties to hold conventions in at least a quarter of municipalities in twelve states presented difficulties for the MDB, a small party with tenuous local bases of support, even before the cassações. Worried that the collapse of the opposition would lead to a one-party state, Costa e Silva instructed Gama e Silva to meet with MDB president Oscar Passos to discuss changes to the requirements to help the MDB survive.¹³³ The generals were cognizant of the need to have an opposition, even if only for show, to combat charges of dictatorship from abroad.

Chastened ARENA leaders were pleased that the military was paying attention to them as for months they had been lobbying for the reestablishment of dialogue. Since continued dialogue would be conditioned on their convincing the military to trust them, the June meeting of the national directorate approved a motion effusively praising Costa e Silva: “The country, under your firm command, understood the necessity of the exceptional instruments [i.e., AI-5] that the government utilized in order to keep the ideals of the Revolution from being frustrated and to be able to ensure the return of the rule of law, without threatening contestations against Peace and Security.”¹³⁴ The motion interpreted AI-5 as a response to generic “perturbations,” conveniently ignoring the fact that the chief perturbation had come from ARENA. While prepared to do nearly anything to get back into the generals’ good graces, admitting blame for AI-5 was going too far.

The approach seemed to be working. Party reorganization proceeded as planned, though some arenistas complained that the government failed to pressure politicians to join ARENA; what was the use of supporting the regime if it failed to return the favor?¹³⁵ The MDB formed enough directorates to survive, but its future was uncertain. Who wanted to join a party that would have no opportunity to win power and possibly lose one’s political rights by doing so? Still, Passos confided to a US diplomat that the party was more united than ever; whatever the flaws of the method, at least the headache of the radical imaturos had been eliminated.¹³⁶

At the same time, Costa e Silva asked Aleixo and a committee of legal scholars to draft constitutional revisions that would incorporate many of the provisions of the institutional acts. This measure was to be accompanied by a host of new reforms designed to facilitate the moralization and control of the political class.

Strict fidelity laws would require party-line votes when party leadership decided that a vote was of vital interest. The end of paid extraordinary sessions would reduce corruption. Reductions in the size of the Chamber of Deputies and the state legislatures would reduce costs and require a higher threshold of votes for a candidate to be elected. In addition, Institutional Act no. 7 (AI-7) capped state deputies' salaries, limited state legislatures to eight paid extra sessions per month, imposed restrictions on living allowances, and eliminated salaries for municipal councilors in cities with fewer than three hundred thousand residents.

The Brazilian generals' approach differed radically from their counterparts in the Southern Cone. In Argentina, the 1966–73 dictatorship dominated by General Juan Carlos Onganía banned political activity outright. By 1976, when a second coup launched the bloody Proceso de Reorganización Nacional, leading figures in the military worried that Onganía's ban on political activity had created pent-up tensions that contributed to the violence from Right and Left that had characterized the three-year Peronist interlude. They thus determined to suspend politics rather than ban them. This more "moderate" posture still entailed the closure of Congress, the banning of left-wing and Peronist parties, and the strict circumscription of right-wing and centrist party activity. The Chilean generals imagined an even more drastic break with the past. Parties that had opposed the 1973 coup were immediately disbanded; four years later, even sympathetic parties were dissolved.¹³⁷ When the Pinochet dictatorship finally sought to legitimize itself via the plebiscite of 1980, neither parties nor Congress entered the equation; instead, the generals hoped to foster civilian political participation through right-wing Catholic-inspired corporatist groups called *gremios*.¹³⁸ In Argentina, politics had to be suspended until an undefined moment in the future. In Chile, corrupt civilian institutions had to be destroyed and replaced with something new.¹³⁹ Meanwhile, in Brazil, even at the regime's most repressive moment, appropriate reforms sought to ensure that they would work for the good of the nation.

By the end of August, the reforms were complete, and Costa e Silva prepared to reopen Congress to approve them on September 7, Brazil's independence day.¹⁴⁰ The punishment of the political class had come to a close, and politicians, firmly under military tutelage, could once again offer their collaboration to the "Revolution." But on August 29, an unexpected development derailed Costa e Silva's plans and definitively changed the course of the military regime. The president suffered a debilitating stroke that left him bedridden. Constitutionally, Aleixo should have assumed the presidency until Costa e Silva recovered and if he did not recover, become president. Yet in the most drastic departure from legality the regime would ever make, the ministers of the army, navy, and air force unilaterally issued Institutional Act no. 12 (AI-12), declaring that until Costa e Silva recovered, they would govern as a junta. Given Aleixo's opposition to AI-5, it was impossible for the military ministers to accept him.¹⁴¹

The decree of AI-12 marked an even more grotesque break with legality than AI-5. AI-5 had superseded a constitution that politicians’ “subversion” had supposedly revealed as inadequate. AI-12 simply ignored the constitution altogether. As Costa e Silva’s health deteriorated, politicians watched nervously, hoping that if the military selected a new general-president, at least Congress might be reconvened to “elect” him. Rio Grande do Sul deputy Brito Velho, one of the most vocal arenistas opposed to the request to prosecute Moreira Alves, decided that he was willing to wait no longer, and on September 13, nine months after the decree of AI-5, he resigned from the Chamber with a dramatic statement: “Nine months is the longest a human being can wait for anything. Anything more belongs to the field of zoology.”¹⁴²

Freed from Costa e Silva’s insistence that relative tolerance should govern the punishments meted out, the junta reopened the process of cassações. Costa e Silva had not called a meeting of the CSN since July 1, when six state deputies and thirty-six local politicians had been removed, but now the junta called six meetings in seven weeks, at which an additional thirty-four politicians, ranging from senators to city councilors, were removed from office and had their political rights suspended. Meanwhile, the junta began polling army generals, who would in turn poll their subordinate officers, to select a new president. In October, they settled on Emílio Garrastazu Médici, head of the SNI under Costa e Silva, and, to the relief of many observers, someone known as a “moderate,” in contrast to the other likely candidate, Interior Minister Albuquerque Lima, who was known as an extreme nationalist who some feared might move Brazil toward the Peruvian model of a left-leaning populist military regime.¹⁴³

In a characteristic nod to legality—out of place after the Aleixo fiasco—the junta reconvened Congress to “elect” Médici to a full five-year term, not simply fulfill the remainder of Costa e Silva’s.¹⁴⁴ Yet in further disregard for democratic norms, the junta decreed its own set of constitutional changes, incorporated into the constitution as Amendment 1. In addition to implementing many of the reforms Costa e Silva and Aleixo had planned, the amendment decreed sweeping changes designed to solidify the executive’s power over the political class. The troublesome article 34, which the Chamber had used to justify its rejection of the request to try Moreira Alves, was rewritten to drastically limit parliamentary immunity. As under the 1967 constitution, legislators could not be imprisoned unless caught in the act of committing a crime, but whereas the old constitution had only included offenses for which there was no bail, the new one allowed imprisonment if they were caught committing *any* crime or if they “disturbed public order.” They could also be tried before the STF without legislative approval.

What would happen to the political class now? Certainly there could be no hope of a quick return to the less dictatorial regime prior to the decree of AI-5. But even within these constraints, politics would continue. Amendment 1 had

established that in 1970 the governors would be chosen by the ARENA-dominated state legislatures; arenistas could thus begin jockeying to gain the military's favor. And elections for the Chamber of Deputies, two-thirds of the Senate, and the state legislatures were still scheduled for 1970. However, the same question as ever remained: How much would politicians truly change? With weapons like AI-5 and party fidelity laws, the military could force them to change behavior, but would politicians accept the permanent military tutelage implied by a "reform of mentality"?

Both the security services and Médici professed confidence that they could change. In a confidential report widely disseminated among the security services and the Armed Forces, the Army Information Center opined:

[Party leaders] understand that it is necessary to correct the behavior of the parties and political factions, with the goal of integrating themselves into the country's process of transformation and becoming vehicles for the transmission of the aspirations of the masses. . . . Both ARENA and the MDB . . . want to be attuned to reality, and thus begin to act in a way that preserves civilian politics.¹⁴⁵

Médici, in his October 25 inaugural address, elaborated his vision for the political class thus:

I believe that political parties have value . . . when the dynamic of ideas prevails over the smallness of personal interests. And I feel that I should urge the party of the Revolution . . . to be a true school of national politics, in harmony with revolutionary thought. And I expect the opposition will honor us by fulfilling its role, pointing out errors, accepting it when we get things right, indicating paths [to be followed], acting as a check, and also making its own school of democracy, dignity, and respect.¹⁴⁶

Similarly, in a December meeting with US ambassador Charles Elbrick, he claimed that Congress "had 'learned its lesson' . . . and was profiting from [its] experience" under AI-5.¹⁴⁷ In a February 1970 interview, Médici made it clear that the road back to meaningful participation would not be easy, emphasizing that a return of "democracy" depended on "the collaboration of all Brazilians, of every class and from every corner," but especially the political class:

The perfection of the democratic regime . . . demands first and foremost a profound change in mentality on the part of those who directly or indirectly influence the political process. . . . Unless zeal for the collective interest begins to prevail over the machinations of individuals or groups, the vices that perverted political-administrative habits and took the country to the brink of . . . catastrophe will persist.¹⁴⁸

Médici claimed that he accepted that the opposition could someday win power but emphasized, "What will by no means be tolerated . . . is that the battle between parties be carried out with the purpose of subverting the regime, nor that the opposition try to win power in order to reestablish the situation that threatened to throw the country into . . . chaos."¹⁴⁹ His aggressive comment left no room

for doubt: the military would hold a tight rein until it felt confident that the political class had abandoned dreams of a return to the past. For ARENA, this meant unquestioning acceptance of the regime's dictates. For the MDB, it meant “constructive” opposition that would respectfully point out mistakes and offer suggestions while avoiding the “subversion” of 1968. If the country was “pacified” by the end of his term, his son claimed later, Médici planned to hand power over to a civilian successor.¹⁵⁰

CONCLUSIONS

By the end of 1969, the political class had experienced its most trying crisis since Vargas imposed his *Estado Novo* in 1937. A year before, in the Moreira Alves vote, the Chamber of Deputies had sought to reassert its independence from the military. That gamble had failed spectacularly. Politicians had been imprisoned and forced into exile. Over three hundred had been banished from politics, their lives thrown into disarray. Congress had spent ten months in recess, and several state legislatures remained closed. And when Costa e Silva fell ill, the military had illegally shoved aside the vice president in favor of another general. Although in public most politicians coped by supporting the regime or simply remaining quiet, 1969 was a pivotal year in the evolution of the political class's disillusionment with military rule. Throughout the year, every indication was that the Armed Forces were united in their belief that “the political class has learned nothing” and would now require military tutelage to force them to put aside “the machinations of individuals or groups” in favor of “zeal for the collective interest.” The implementation of a sweeping military-engineered project to not only defeat “subversion” and remake Brazil's economy and administrative structure but also discipline the political class had begun. This was not intended as a temporary solution. Rather, Costa e Silva, Médici, and officers from across the “moderate” and “hard-line” spectrum envisioned a dramatic transformation of politics that would convince politicians, by force if necessary, to set aside self-interest and work under military tutelage for Brazil's development. Now Congress would exist to carry out the will of the “Revolution.” As federal deputy Clovis Stenzel, the regime's eternally zealous defender, put it, “Either [Congress] will join the Revolution, and there will be a Congress, or it won't, and there won't be a Congress.”¹⁵¹

At the time, with military regimes in control of much of Latin America, it appeared legitimate to those who led the regime to question whether liberal democracy was adequate to meet the challenges of national security. Perhaps democracy needed to be subjugated to a centralized executive empowered to cut through political wrangling and red tape to ensure security and development. If this solution ran counter to the mundane interests of the political class, so what? Perhaps this was the wave of the future. As Senator Milton Campos pointed out after Congress reopened, the Italian political scientists Gaetano Mosca and Vilfredo Pareto had

shown that it was natural for a new political class—in this case, the military and technocrats—to replace old leaders, in an endless “circulation of elites.” Although Campos worried that “circulation” by result of force was “eroding democracy,” the phenomenon was inevitable.¹⁵² Perhaps the old political class was obsolete, to be replaced by a military-dominated technocracy.

Yet this project contained a fundamental contradiction: while mistrusting politicians, it refused to completely push them aside. Despite the subordination of the political class to the military, the generals had been shaped by a century and a half of Brazilian liberal discourse that made them unwilling to forgo the semblance of the “democratic” legitimacy elected civilian politicians provided. Hence there was never any serious consideration of closing Congress permanently; even avowedly “hard-line” officers took for granted that legislatures and elections would endure. By refusing to govern without civilian political elites, the Brazilian military’s actions kept alive politicians’ hopes that they might someday regain their power and privileges.

Over the next five years, the generals would nearly convince themselves that the political class had been transformed into the enlightened, pliant ruling elites of whom they dreamed, lending a democratic facade to military rule by participating in elections, voting on bills, and doing as they were told. Although a few young politicians would opt for a more militant posture against the regime, the response of most of their colleagues would be to wait out the dictatorial storm—or to take advantage of it to build their own careers.