

Brazilians will go to the polls in a national election, finally

by Mark Sonnenblick

Election fever is sweeping Brazil. The walls and even the streets are painted with slogans and names of candidates. All Brazil is taking the Nov. 15 elections with a fervor and seriousness usually reserved for Carnival and World Cup soccer.

For over half the electorate, those who were under 21 in 1962, this will be the first time in their lives they have voted in a general election. In 1964, a military coup overthrew the Goulart government, and in the nearly two decades since then there have been only tightly controlled congressional and local elections.

Now Brazil is returning to democracy. In November, the governors of Brazil's 23 states, quite powerful in Brazil, will be elected. Also up for election will be the entire Chamber of Deputies, a third of the Senate, state legislatures and all local mayors and councilmen. The one post not up in this election is the presidency. But the officials to be elected now will constitute the electoral college which will perform the final step of electing a successor to President João Figueiredo in 1984. Thus, this election will shape Brazilian politics for the next decade.

The elections offer a tremendous opportunity for Brazil to find its way out of the authoritarian political system which, proponents and detractors alike readily admit, has now outlived its institutional viability. By opening the door to increasing citizen participation, the election can help unlock the creative potential of its 130 million people.

But the election process is also fraught with dangers which could abort Brazil's gradual transition towards a functioning republican system of government. Unless either the government or the opposition parties produce a program to pull Brazil out of its current economic depression, something neither has done yet, a sharp polarization of the country's political forces is the probable outcome. This could in turn push nervous hard-liners in Brazil's military to try to put a stop to the return to democracy altogether.

Standard wisdom in Brazil is that the elections will be a toss-up between the government PDS party and the opposition forces. Most Brazilians are "opposed" to the government's policies and want to see change. But, aiding the government is the fact that most are also unhappy with the contentless opposition program. Also on the government's side is the fact that they have rigged the election rules, and have set up a balloting system to facilitate vote fraud. There are indications that they are prepared to hold on to state power by one means or another, even if the elections prove to be an

overwhelming mandate for change.

But under conditions of increasing economic collapse, and especially if Brazil is driven to accept austerity prescribed by the International Monetary Fund *before* the November elections, a surprise landslide victory for the opposition is not impossible—despite all the dirty tricks and all the opinion polls suggesting that the regime will come out fairly well.

During the dark years of heavy-handed official repression under President Medici (1969-74), more far-sighted national security planners realized that their hopes for Brazil to be a great power could not be realized in a country in which the government's major efforts had to be focused on controlling the citizenry. As chief advisor to President Ernesto Geisel (1974-79), General Golbery de Conto e Silva devised a "political opening" (*abertura* in Portuguese) to serve as a safety valve for the social pressures which had been built up by the uneven process of Brazil's economic development. Golbery remained to pursue the *abertura* policy under President João Figueiredo (1979-85)—until he was forced into retirement by anti-*abertura* factions inside the military regime in August 1981. Figueiredo, however, has remained faithful—as much as he could—to his initial promises of moving Brazil toward democracy. The Nov. 15 elections are a supreme test of his ability to remain in command of Brazil's destiny.

It is a difficult test; powerful forces inside and outside Brazil would welcome a failure. *The New York Times*, on the eve of Figueiredo's exposition of the need for a new growth-oriented international economic system before the United Nations Sept. 27, chose to remind the Brazilian president of the vulnerability of his political opening plans, should he take leadership in the fight for world financial changes. Figueiredo was not cowed. Asked by a reporter if the signs of economic crisis, as shown by the soaring black market rate for the cruzeiro and rising interest rates, would not affect the elections, Figueiredo replied: "No, the elections will take place Nov. 15. The elections will happen, even if the dollar is at 600, even if at 800, or at 1,000 cruzeiros; even if the interest rates are at 20 or at 10 percent [per month]."

Inside Brazil, military hardliners recoil at the possibility that a real *abertura* would permit leftists to take vengeance against the police apparatus which waged "dirty warfare" against them following the 1967 outbreak of urban and rural guerrilla warfare. With the cooperation of the hegemonic "Liberation Theology" faction of the Catholic Church, credibility has been given to a new set of potential "leftist" agents provocateurs.

Efforts to incite left-right warfare and panic conservative military officers into smashing the *abertura* are ongoing. The oligarchic Tradition, Family and Property (TFP) and its allies in Brazil's security forces have orchestrated a series of incidents—ranging from fake newspapers to terrorist bombings—against the radical clergy and their followers, designed to trigger responses. Well-informed sources have told *EIR* that U.S. Special Ambassador General Vernon Walters, the Averell Harriman protégé who helped coordinate the 1964 Brazilian coup, is involved in furthering these destabilizations. Walters is reportedly taking advantage of his close personal ties to leading hard-line Brazilian generals, as well as his position as director of the TFP-linked Christendom College in Front Royal, Virginia.

What's at stake in the elections

Brazil's governors control powerful political and economic forces, including state development banks, state utilities, and so on. Until now, they have been hand-picked by the President. The state of Rio de Janeiro was given to a corrupt machine nominally associated with the opposition, but all the other state governors are currently members of the regime's own Social Democratic Party (PDS).

With direct election of the 23 governors this year, the

opposition expects to seize control over 16 or 17 states; the government, however, asserts they will hold on to 14 or 15. What is certain is that the key industrial state of São Paulo will go to Franco Montoro, a moderate senator in the opposition PMDB party, while the PDS will sweep at least half a dozen states of the impoverished Northeast. The "solid North" goes with the conservative incumbent party for much the same reasons of patronage that once made "the solid South" go for the Democratic Party in the United States.

Throughout the country, there are hot rivalries for federal and state deputy and for local offices.

Foreseeing that free elections could serve as a plebiscite for voting out "the system" which ruled Brazil since 1964 and open the door to irresponsible opposition parties, General Golbery arranged a "political reform" over the last three years. This reform has succeeded in dividing the single opposition party into four fiercely competing opposition parties. While ostensibly increasing the level of freedom in Brazil, this move is widely understood as a divide-and-conquer operation to permit the unified government party to win many races with only a quarter to a third of the total vote. The only opposition party with a good chance to win many governorships, the PMDB, is accusing the other smaller parties of being Trojan horses of the regime, which is not wholly untrue.

Brazil's political parties: lack of policy direction

PDS (Social Democratic Party): Despite the name, the PDS is a conservative party of Brazil's military regime and has no connection with the international social democracy. The party now holds large majorities in both houses of congress and holds the governorships of 22 of Brazil's 23 states. It has more money and leverage than the other parties, but will do fair to poorly in the upcoming elections. The widely-used IBOPE poll gives the PDS 33 percent of the national vote. Many of its politicians would like the government to reverse the depression policies which will harm the party in November.

PMDB (Brazilian Democratic Movement Party): The vestige of the old single opposition party is by far the strongest opposition force, and will win many states. It is an extremely heterogeneous party, including in its ranks everyone from conservatives to members of the outlawed Communist Party. Its party program is a laundry list of desirable things the government could do, were it to have lots of money. But the PMDB, like the other parties, has yet to provide a serious program for getting Brazil out of

the crisis. Its main focus is on the formal side of restoring democratic participation. It is predominately a party of younger middle-class and of skilled workers. Polls place the PMDB at 31 percent of the vote.

PT (Workers' Party): This party advocates class struggle. It is recruiting cadre from the Church's grass-roots communities, from the labor movement, and from the universities. The PT's chairman, a trade union leader, known by his nickname, "Lulu", poses as the Lech Walesa of Brazil and is run by the same intentional solidarist networks. The PT's current political base is mainly among the liberal professionals earning 5 to 25 times the minimum wage, while its support among the mass of workers is minimal. Ascribed 4 percent of the national vote.

PTB (Brazilian Workers' Party): An artificial construct to divide opposition votes. Ex-president Janio Quadros is running for governor of Sao Paulo on the PTB line. Polls give the PTB 4 percent of the vote.

PDT (Democratic Workers Party): The PDT is the personal machine of Leonel Brizola, the fire-eating populist who incited armed resistance to the 1964 coup. In exile, Brizola became the pet Brazilian of the Socialist International and Willy Brandt's conference circuit. His current opposition pose is so militant and so contentless that many believe he is just trying to steal votes from potential PMDB winners. However, the latest polls give him a slight edge.