A political history of the Brazilian transition from military dictatorship to democracy¹

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses Brazilian political history, from the military-political coup in 1964 through Fernando Henrique Cardoso's second presidential term. Written in the form of an explanatory summary, three themes are joined in a narrative on the transition from a military dictatorship to a liberal democratic regime: the military, the political and the bureaucratic. We seek to establish causal inferences linking content, methods and the reasons for and meaning of political change beginning in 1974 with the quality of the democratic regime as it emerged during the 1990s. Our explanation is premised on the need to analyze two different but interconnected spaces of the political: transformation in the institutional systems of the State apparatus and the evolution of the broader political scenario. We conclude that neo-liberal economic reforms not only dispensed with true political reform able to increase representation and with reform of the State in ways that would favor participation. Neo-liberal reforms also continued to be premised on authoritarian arrangements of governing processes inherited from the previous political period.

Keywords: Brazilian politics [1964-2002]; military dictatorship; political transition; democracy; neo-liberalism.

I. INTRODUCTION: ISSUES OF TERMINOLOGY AND PERIODIZATION

In Brazil, the military dictatorship lasted 25 years, from 1964 to 1989, included six different presidential administrations (one of them headed by a civilian), and its history may be divided into five major stages.

¹ A different version of this article, destined for a foreign readership, appeared in 2006 in the edited volume I organized (CODATO, 2006).

The first stage, characterized by the *constitution of the military dictatorship as political regime*, roughly corresponds to the Castello Branco and Costa e Silva administrations (in office from March of 1964 until December, 1968). A second stage, of *regime consolidation*, corresponds to the Medici administration (1969-1974). A third stage, the Geisel administration (1974-1979), can be seen as a *regime transformation*, followed by a stage of *dissolution* during the Figueiredo administration (1979-1985). Lastly, there is the stage of *transition* to a liberal-democratic regime (the Sarney administration: 1985-1989).

From the start, there are three aspects of this history that deserve particular emphasis. First, the process of "political détente", later referred to as a "politics of opening" and eventually of "political transition", was initiated by the military, rather than springing from pressures coming from "civil society". The latter did have a decisive influence on these events, though less over the course they followed and more over the pace at which they occurred Second, the nature, unfolding and goals of the process were also *determined* by the military (or, more precisely, by one of its many political and ideological currents). Finally, it corresponded to the needs of the military itself, in the sense of permitting a solution for that corporation's internal problems, rather than representing a sudden conversion to democracy on the part of military officials.²

The control that the Armed Forces held over the State apparatus and their ostensive presence on the political scene ended up bringing a series of political and ideological conflicts within the military apparatus, thus subverting the traditional hierarchy and the chains of command derived from it. As has been observed in the literature, the transformation of the Brazilian "political model" (to use Cardoso's (1972) expression) was not originally meant "as the military's return to the barracks, but as the expulsion of politics from the latter". (Martins, 1979-1980, p. 22)

The faction that recovered control of the government after General Geisel took office as President in March of 1974 – faction that had been politically marginalized when General Costa e Silva became the supreme commander of the "Revolution" in 1967 (Gaspari, 2002a) – had two basic strategic goals, one political and the other military: to reestablish the structure and order within the military establishment, and to guarantee greater institutional stability and political predictability for the dictatorial regime. In order to carry out the first of these tasks, that of *internal disciplining*, this faction would have to gradually distance the Armed Forces from the global command of national politics and restrain the activities of its sectors of information and State repression, thus reducing as well one of sources of power of the rival faction. The changes imposed on the organization and mode of functioning of the State apparatus, whose most salient trait was a significant *centralization* of power in the figure of the President of the Republic

² Barbara Geddens notes that "different types of authoritarianism enter into collapse through characteristically different modes [...] A study of 163 authoritarian regimes in 94 countries provides proof that there are real differences in patterns of collapse [...] Classifying authoritarian regimes into three different types –personalist, military and one-party – Geddes argues that "the transition from military government usually begin with divisions within the governing military elite [...] There [...] a consensus in the literature regarding the fact that the majority of professional soldiers value the survival and the efficiency of the military above and beyond all else [...] Most members of officialdom are more concerned with the unity of the armed forces than with the military control or lack of control over the government". (Geddes, 2001, p. 221, 228, 232 and 235, respectively).

(Codato, 1997), were thus meant to place limitations on the extreme right, transferring decisions regarding prisons, political rights, and elections to the upper echelons of the Executive.

The second task, that of *regime security*, involved revising certain aspects of the regime in order to institutionalize a more liberal model of politics, through a progressive restoration of some minimal civil liberties. The final goal was not exactly to revoke authoritarianism and institute "democracy", but to make the military dictatorship less politically conservative.³

The original military project evolved as a pendular process alternating periods of greater and lesser political violence, according to a logic that was more circumstantial than it was instrumental; in itself, it is indicative of the difficulties that the government was experiencing in controlling all of the variables implicated in transition politics. The politics of liberalization of the Brazilian military dictatorship continued throughout the Figueiredo government (1979-1985) – now referred to as "political opening" – due to the normalization of parliamentary activity and the maintenance of an electoral calendar, after the partial revoking of emergency measures (in 1978), the granting of political amnesty and political party reform (in 1979). The relatively free elections that were carried out in the seventies and the eighties "created a dynamics of their own" (Lima Jr., 1993, p. 39), making the transition *process* to some extent different than the original military project. Thus, in Brazil, the relationship between voting and democratization (of the political sphere) was no coincidence. (Lamounier, 1986) though it was, to a certain extent, unexpected. The elections influenced the course of events, speeding up the pace of regime transformation, albeit without changing its conservative character. The "New Republic" (1985-1990), that is, the last administration in the cycle of the regime of military dictatorship (although civilian-headed) wraps up this lengthy period of transition by establishing the political hegemony of a party that opposed the regime (1986), promulgating a new Constitution (1988) and carrying out popular presidential elections (1989).

The decade of the nineties was – according to a major part of the literature – the decade of *consolidation* of the liberal democratic regime. This process spans the Collor de Mello administration (1990-1992), the Itamar Franco administration (1992-1995) and Fernando Henrique Cardoso's presidency (1995-2002). The "democratic consolidation" took place within a peculiar institutional situation. The scenario resulting from the new Constitution, conjugated *presidentialism* as a form of government with *federalism* as a formula for the relationship between the State and the sub-national units (Mainwaring, 1997), the *political coalition* as a formula for governability (Abranches, 1988) and all of the above resting on a *fragmented party system* (Nicolau, 1996) with a low level of institutionalization and excessively regionalized (Abrucio, 1998). This institutional combination (or, according to some, *institutional deformation*) led the transition process, in the end, in the following direction: toward an *electoral* democracy, an *imperial* Executive and a congressional regime functioning sometimes as collaborator and

³ As a confirmation of the non-democratic objectives behind the project of the political liberalization of the regime, see the long interview with General Geisel with the CPDOC. (D'Araújo e Castro (eds.), 1997)

sometimes as veto player to the initiatives taken by the president, the political system's main actor⁴.

The goal of this article is to rethink national political history as of 1974, attempting to clarify the variables that influenced the political and institutional configuration of the current regime. My premise is not just that "history matters", which is a mere truism, but that there are causal relationships between the content, methods, reasons for and meanings of the political change from dictatorship to democracy in Brazil.

II. AN ANALYTICAL MODEL

It seems to make sense to summarize recent Brazilian history in terms of on the most significant aspects of the political transition (1974-1989) and of the consolidation of democracy (1989-2002), in order to propose an *interpretation* of this history. Stepping back in this manner from an "empirically oriented" Political Science which would present general hypotheses deduced from a typology of transitions and a (*descriptive and normative*) model of democratization, it becomes indispensable to go beyond a merely classificatory perspective and recover the *historical dimensions* of the political process.

The vast literature that specializes on "political transitions" emerged in the eighties and nineties inspired by the institutionalist paradigm promoted an important transformation in political scientists' analyses of processes of political change. The at that time prevailing "macro-structural" model of reference, based on economic and social explanatory variables, came to be questioned by a research agenda that emphasized eminently political variables for our understanding of the passage from "authoritarianism" to democracy.

This new generation of works – which can be grouped under the precise, though hardly euphonious heading of "transitology"⁵ – has three important characteristics which distinguish it from macro-oriented analyses: (*i*) an emphasis on the study of *political actors* – their interests, values, strategies, etc. (in synch with the theory of rational choice and methodological individualism; thus in opposition to classical explanations); (*ii*) salience given to the *endogenous factors* in each country in the study of the course taken by the transition process (and not to global factors such as "transformations in processes of capital accumulation"), and (*iii*) the adoption of a *minimalist* (à la Schumpeter: democracy is a method for choosing leaders) and not very extensive notion of "democracy", since it was held that this was the only way to comprehend a series of national cases that have significant differences. Perhaps the most problematic aspect of these approaches is their excessively contingent perspective (Reis, 1997), often in the wake of the uncertainties of the political situation and *ad hoc* commitments of "strategic" actors.

⁴ Although his institutional prerogatives, particularly the legislative ones, would not yield *automatic* returns in terms of actual capacity to make and implement decisions, the president continued to figure as the center of the political system. For a discussion on these aspects as related to the history of the Brazilian transition, see Kinzo (2001).

⁵ Stéphane Monclaire's contribution to this book (Chapter 4: "Democracy, Transition and Consolidation: Making Concepts More Precise") presents an insightful discussion of studies on this issue.

Following a different course than the one that focuses only on events pertaining to the political scenario and institutional factors for purposes of explanation, I believe it is necessary to emphasize here the political and ideological requirements that prevailed in the process of construction of political democracy in Brazil over the last decade. In this approach, the historical dimension is considered essential⁶. Recent history is the backdrop of a long and erratic process of construction of a liberal-democratic order out of the spoils of a military dictatorship. Thus, the attempt here is to call attention to this dimension, whether due to its absence in certain formalist analyses of transition/consolidation or to the incidental presence of selected "facts" in certain narratives, reduced to mere examples used only to illustrate a postulate or confirm a "theory".

The legitimacy of this typological approach – characteristic of a certain kind of Political Science – is evidently not at issue here. It is just as useful as the macro sociological interpretations inspired by Political Sociology. Rather, what is really at issue is the question of the character of the *variables* that make up the analysis based on models – whichever ones are chosen. Furthermore, what we are really discussing is whether these variables are or are not a translation, at the abstract level, of concrete and historically – produced elements. Therefore, the perspective adopted here considers more productive "*the historical determination* of abstract aspects that are arbitrarily isolated for hermeneutic purposes and the restitution to the protagonists of political processes, who have been sociologically conceived as subjects of non-specified interests, of their socially concrete character, examining them in their constitution and their historical evolution". (Quartim de Moraes, 1985)

In order to elaborate an interpretation of the period under discussion, we should, in the first place, present a summary of the political "facts" in the most conventional sense of the word. These events are organized here according to a new proposal for periodizing regimes – whether dictatorial or democratic – in which the long interval between 1964 and 2002 is divided into phases and these phases, into stages. Each one of these phases – which may or may not coincide with particular governments as they do in common chronologies – does however correspond to a process: constitution, consolidation, transformation, etc. of a political model. The stages refer to turning points within each phase and also between one phase and the next (which, in general, coincide with *political* crises.) This is not meant to represent more than an initial indication of the time sequences these political processes follow, since real explanation would demand that attention be given to each crisis and the moments of rupture within this continuum. In the second place, some analytical parameters for an analysis of the Brazilian political process, in accordance with Brazilian political history are established. We intend to suggest that the program of political change can be better understood when the connections between four interrelated problems are taken into account: the content, nature, reasons for and more general meaning of the transition from one regime to another. In the third and final place, we seek to understand the political movement occurring between 1974 and 2002 through two pre-defined parameters: transformations

⁶ For a more detailed discussion of this approach, see Fernandes (2002).

in the form taken by the State, and the evolution of the form taken by the political regime. Each one of these variables covers a different political space. The first enables us to capture changes in the relation of forces between the apparatuses and branches of the State system; second, disputes in the political party system (Poulantzas, 1968). The analyses we present here are more suggested than developed, involving as they do a wide spectrum of topics. There are three themes through which we attempt, in the end, to bring unity to the narrative: the *military*, the *political* and the *bureaucratic*. The essay-like tone of this paper derives not only from the level of abstraction – the focus here being on large-scale processes – but also from its basic intention: to offer a reasonably faithful overview of the dynamics of recent Brazilian politics.

III. THE POLITICAL HISTORY OF THE BRAZILIAN TRANSITION

The 1964 coup marked a decisive modification in the political function of the military in Brazil. The final action taken against the populist democratic regime (1946-1964) or, in the terms preferred by the conservatives, the "Revolution" that they carried out, brought with it two novelties. No longer was it a matter of intermittent operations of the Armed Forces, aimed at specific goals – usually to "combat disorder" (mass politics) or "communism" (social government policy) or "corruption" (i.e. politics per se) – but now meant *permanent intervention*. What had previously been a political guarantee that the Armed Forces provided to civilian governments, most notably in the post-1930 period, now became a *military government*. There was, in fact, a change in "political regime". Similarly, it was no longer another *pronunciamiento*, in which a prestigious military chief or a group of officials refused to obey the government, but an *institutional* movement of the Armed Forces (O'Donnell, 1975; Cardoso, 1982). This was the first time a *military apparatus* rather than a political leader of the military took over control first of the government (*i.e.* the Executive), then the State (and its various apparatuses) and later the political scenario (*i.e.* institutions of representation).⁷

If this type of action is at the root of the relative autonomy of the military apparatus over the "civil world" after 1964, it should nonetheless be kept in mind that the presence of military officials on the national political scene was not in itself a novelty, and especially not after the Revolution of 1930.

But the *military interventions* of 1937 (the coup of the *Estado Novo*) or 1945 (the coup that puts an end to the *Estado Novo*) have nothing to do with a supposed "moderator pattern" that the Armed Forces have been said to have played in all national political crises, mediating the conflicts between civilian politicians since the Republic (Stepan, 1971). This hypothetical pattern actually corresponds to a specific series of *historical determinations* that are the source of the political autonomy and ideological singularity exhibited by the military branch of the Brazilian State. They are due basically to: *(i)* the

 $^{^{7}}$ This new form of intervention, more bureaucratic and less provisory, was followed – albeit with some regional differences – by all South American military regimes (Brazil, Argentina, Chile and Uruguay) during the 1960s and 1970s. Mathias (2004) engages in a detailed discussion of all the related aspects of the "process of militarization" of the Brazilian state during that period.

centralization of military power (in two ways: from the base to the top of the bureaucratic apparatus; from the periphery to the center of the political system); (*ii*) the ideological swing of those in the upper echelons of power in the Armed Forces, from *getulismo* (i.e. authoritarianism) to *antigetulismo* in 1945 and 1964 (i.e. anti-populism); (*iii*) officials' aversion to a mass politics, with the latter represented by incentives to trade union mobilization and nationalist exaltation (which would explain the above-mentioned swing); and (*iv*) the attitude taken by the military in relation to democracy, or more precisely, its refusal not of the principal of universal suffrage but of its practical consequences: the "wrong" electoral results of the 1945-1964 period. (Quartim de Moraes, 1985)

It is precisely these historical determinations – this *elitism*, in a broad sense – that are at the base of the intervention of the upper echelons of the Armed Forces in the political process in 1964. It is the upper echelons that attempt to legitimate or, better put, to justify their governing role in light of the political crisis of the 1960s; that inform the strategy for the modification of the dictatorial regime in the 1970s; that in the eighties – at the end of this modification – give shape to the desired form of government; and, in the end preserve their own political and institutional autonomy in the 1990s.

From a purely chronological point of view the political history of the military dictatorship and Brazilian transition from military dictatorship to liberal democracy can be described in the following manner:

Phase 1: *Constitution of the military dictatorship* (Castello Branco and Costa e Silva administrations)

Stage 1: March 1964 (coup d'État) – October 1965 (political parties abolished⁸)

Stage 2: October 1965 (indirect elections for the President of the Republic are established) – January 1967 (new Constitution)

Stage 3: March 1967 (Costa e Silva takes presidential office) – November 1967 (armed struggle begins⁹)

Stage 4: March 1968 (beginning of student protest) – December 1968 (increased political repression¹⁰)

Phase 2: *Consolidation of the military dictatorship* (Costa e Silva e Medici administrations)

Stage 5: August 1969 (Costa e Silva takes ill; a military junta takes over the government) – September 1969 (Medici is chosen as President of the Republic¹¹)

⁸ Through the Institutional Act no. 2 (Oct. 27, 1965). The multi-party system (1945-1965) is transformed into a twoparty system: a pro-regime party ARENA (*Aliança Renovadora Nacional;* National Alliance for Renovation); and an opposition party, the MDB (*Movimento Democrático Brasileiro;* Brazilian Democratic Movement).

⁹ First action by the Aliança Libertadora Nacional (ALN) in São Paulo under Carlos Marighella's leadership.

¹⁰ After the promulgation of Institutional Act no. 5 (Dec. 13, 1968).

Stage 6: October 1969 (new Constitution) – January 1973 (ebbing of armed struggle)
Stage 7: June 1973 (Medici announces his successor) – January 1974 (indirect congressional election of President Geisel)

Phase 3: Transformation of the military dictatorship (Geisel government)

Stage 8: March 1974 (Geisel takes office) – August 1974 (politics of regime transformation announced)
Stage 9: November 1974 (MDB victory in Senate elections) – April 1977 (Geisel shuts down the National Congress)
Stage 10: October 1977 (dismissal of head of the Armed Forces) – January 1979 (Institutional Act no. 5 revoked)

Phase 4: *Decomposition of the military regime* (Figueiredo government)

Stage 11: March 1979 (Figueiredo takes office) – November 1979 (extinction of the two political parties, ARENA and MDB)
Stage 12: April 1980 (workers strike in São Paulo) – August 1981 (Golbery leaves the government)
Stage 13: November 1982 (direct elections for state governorships; opposition becomes majority in the House of Representatives) – April 1984 (amendment for direct elections defeated¹²)
Stage 14: January 1985 (Opposition wins in Presidential elections) – March 1985 (José Sarney takes office¹³)

Phase 5: *Transition – under military tutelage – to a liberal democratic regime* (Sarney administration)

Stage 15: April/May 1985 (Tancredo Neves dies; constitutional amendment reestablishes direct presidential elections) – February 1986 (the *Plano Cruzado* to combat inflation is announced)

Stage 16: November 1986 (PMDB victory in the general elections) – October 1988 (new constitution is promulgated)

Stage 17: March 1989 (beginning of campaigning for the upcoming presidential elections) – December 1989 (Collor de Mello elected president)

¹¹ The "election" of Costa e Silva's successor was carried out by consulting the High Command of the Armed Forces. (Martins Filho, 1995, p. 184)

¹² The high point in the campaign for the reestablishment of direct presidential elections, that began in January 1984 in Curitiba, was in April of that same year, when a rally in Rio de Janeiro with the presence of the main figures of the opposition to the military regime brought almost one million people together, and more than a million a few days later (the 16th) in São Paulo. On the 25th, the National Congress rejected the Constitutional amendment that provided for immediate direct elections the following year (1985) For a discussion of the relationship between these social movements and the process of regime change, see Alberto Tosi Rodrigues' article (2001).

¹³ The PDS (*Partido Democrático Social*), political association that was heir to the ARENA party, undergoes a split in 1984; the dissident faction supports the Tancredo Neves-José Sarney candidacy for upcoming presidential elections.

Phase 6: *Consolidation of the liberal-democratic regime* (Collor, Itamar Franco, and Fernando Henrique Cardoso administrations)

Stage 18: March 1990 (Fernando Collor de Mello takes presidential office; economic plan – *Plano Collor I* – announced) – January 1991 (*Plano Collor II* is announced)

Stage 19: December 1992 (President Collor is *impeached*. Vicepresident Itamar Franco takes over as President of the Republic) – July 1994 (economic plan, the *Plano Real* is announced)

Stage 20: January 1995 (Fernando Henrique Cardoso takes office as president) – June 1997 (amendment approving reelection to a second term as President of the Republic and for heads of state and municipal governments is approved)

Stage 21: January 1999, (Fernando Henrique Cardoso begins his second term in office) – October/November 2000 (opposition parties are victorious in municipal elections throughout the country)

Stage 22 : July 2002 (presidential campaigning begins) – January 2003 (Luis Inacio Lula da Silva takes office as president)

This simplified periodization of the political scenario (with perhaps a small dose of arbitrariness in the selection of the events) maps out the time span of the military regime (1964-1974), the transition period (1974-1989) and the period of time that it took to consolidate the new regime (1989-2002)¹⁴. Nonetheless, it should not be considered indicative of the most significant traits of contemporary Brazilian politics, nor does it permit us to infer causal relations that explain the succession of events or the passage from one stage to another. In reality, it is not possible to understand neither the political transition nor the democratic consolidation *in isolation from* their connections to *concrete political processes*. The latter in turn must be seen as dependent upon the country's historical trajectory as well as the historical conditions that spring from this trajectory, or – in the absence of a better name – the "contexts" and the interaction between the diverse actors, which in this case means the *Armed Forces* (as political agent), the *State* (as institutional organization) and *Society* (as the entirety of social agents).

Nonetheless, the interaction between these elements – *the Armed Forces, the State and society* – could be understood in a merely formalist manner if in the analysis they are not taken as historically determined units. The origin of the power of the military apparatus over other social institutions and its ideological distance from "real democracy" was made clear above. There is no space here to give further development to the other topics that are implicated. What we are simply attempting to emphasize here is that a more extensive understanding of the "State" requires seeing it as a complex of institutions, organisms, apparatuses and bureaucratic agencies whose configuration is not

¹⁴ Cruz (2005) suggests a more simplified periodization of the regime, dividing it into ten-year cycles: 1964 (beginning with the coup); 1974 (an inflection: political transition); 1984 (the high point of the opposition movement).

indifferent to the evolution of the relations of hierarchy and subordination between different decision-making centers, on the one hand, and the concrete articulation of these apparatuses (and their respective occupants) with classes and social groups, on the other. Similarly, "Society" is the result of a specific pattern of capitalist development (a "model of development" springing from a "mode of production") that is linked to a particular combination – within a concrete social formation – of structures of production and class structure. (Abranches, 1979; Martins, 1985)

IV. SOME VARIABLES OF POLITICAL ANALYSES

Analysis of the political dynamics of transition requires responding to at least four basic questions:

1) *What changes?* In other words, which political institutions are suppressed or restored or transformed in this process of political evolution?

2) *How do these changes occur?* That is, what is the nature of the process that governs these changes?

3) *Why do these changes occur?* In other words, what are the reasons behind the substitution of one political model with another?

4) *What direction is change going in?* That is, what is the broader meaning of political conversion?

The first question – that is, what it is in the regime that changes over time – requires a definition of the nature (conservative, liberal or radical) and the breadth (greater, lesser) of the political and institutional changes introduced in the political model of regime over the course of time by the (military) political elite. From this perspective, the approach to the problem is wedded to political history but is not reducible to a simple chronicle of events in the form of an explanatory summary.¹⁵ In the proper sense of the term, it is not a "chronology" (i.e. an arrangement of facts in a recognizable temporal sequence, one after the other) but a *periodization*; a temporal subdivision of the political space that is linked to overt or covert actions of social classes and political and military groups. This general periodization should be complemented by a specifically political periodization, which means a sequential arrangement of different political regimes over time, regimes that are linked to the party disputes of the political scene. (Poulantzas, 1968) In the specific case of regimes of military dictatorship there are at least two important complications: "classes" are not the only actors in the political process (nor are they the most important ones) and political parties tend to lose their representation function, which is transferred to the State apparatus. This transfer also involves some difficulties and complexities, which explain the competition between segments of the armed forces and the civilian state elite (the "technocrats"). In short, let us leave things this way: the higher echelons of the Armed Forces assume responsibility for political and ideological questions and the state (civilian) elite, for economic issues (Codato, 2005).

¹⁵ Bayart (1976) provides a classification of three different histories of the Brazilian authoritarian regime as: Skidmore, 1967 (we could include here Skidmore, 1988); Schneider, 1971; and Fiechter, 1974.

Thus, a more complete and rigorous periodization than the one presented here should cover transformations in the *state system* (e.g. dislocations of the centers of power, the alterations in their respective hierarchies as well as their degree of "militarization") *and* the institutional evolution and involution of the political scenario (e.g. the widening or restriction of "liberties" and their influence over both movements of "civil society" and political party dynamics). These two levels or regions of political space are not only correlated but mutually determining. The motivation behind the introduction, within the regime, of certain liberal institutions and practices cannot be understood without keeping in mind changes, for instance, in the relation of forces between the different apparatuses (and, respectively, those who control them) that make up the state system. The Geisel administration – and the President's dominion over the presidency – serves as the best example of what this means.

To attempt to answer the second question – how do changes occur? – means providing an exposition of the political process, with fundamental emphasis on the action of "strategic actors" (Martins, 1979-1980, p. 20-21) and on the reaction that other "strategic actors" have toward them. According to Luciano Martins, the crucial issue involves discovering in whose hands the *initiatives* of the process lie; who has *control* over the political process (since the latter does not necessarily follow the former); how the arrangements or political coalitions that lead to the evolution of a program for change are put together; and which, among the various political projects for regime transformation, is preponderant. (Martins, 1988, p. 113) The narrative that we present here tends to obey a general logic of "cause and effect". Yet it is always risky to isolate one independent variable that is capable of explaining the entire political process. Since there is always interaction not only between political actors (and social agents) but also between political actors and political institutions, and since their respective performances are dependent precisely on this interaction, it would be wiser to think in terms of the interdependence of variables (political, economic, social, ideological, etc.) and in the change that occurs over time in the character, importance and significance of these same variables,¹⁶ as they are historically determined. It is not enough to indicate that the selfreform of the regime was a result of the decision of a military president to restrain the autonomy of the military bureaucracy as seems to be the case in Elio Gaspari's understanding (2003; 2004). For better or for worse, once in action, the process of reform of the military dictatorship tended to move beyond the original project.

The third question – why does the regime change? – reminds the observer of the need for a precise grasp of the contradictions of the model itself and its difficulties in terms of: (i) political legitimation; (ii) internal organization and (iii) institutional evolution. As it is evident, these are not simple problems – neither for analysts of dictatorship politics, nor for the constitutionalists of dictatorship politics. The nature and scope of change are conditioned by the type of answer the elite in control of political initiative gives to those

¹⁶ Couto (1998) suggests a very complex model to understand the process of political and *economic* transition in Brazil, in the decade of the nineties. He argues that three dimensions should be simultaneously integrated into analysis of the political system: institutions (and their changes), actors (and their conversions) and the general political and social context, which always varies from one conjuncture to the next.

problems. The problem of the *legitimation* of the military regime, for example, is present from the very start. Should the military government stimulate an "active consensus" (that would mean some degree of social mobilization, with all the risks there implied), or seek support in a "passive consent", that is, tacit, as is the case in liberal democracies?¹⁷

The problem of institutional *evolution* is initially double-faced: on the one hand, there is the matter of the State and its occupants, and on the other, the civil society and its movements.

Schematically speaking, the first dimension is linked to the controversy over the new function of the *President* of the Republic (what are the limits to his prerogatives?) and over presidential succession (how should the successor be chosen? And who should be chosen?) Should the presidency be the *locus* of the political coordination and ideological supervision of the state system (with the ministries, councils and commissions remaining in the hands of the executive)? This seems to be the form taken on under the Medici administration. Or should it be the one organ that concentrates the power of the state as occurred under Geisel? Should the president be seen as a mere "delegate of the Revolution" or as a "supreme commander" of the Armed Forces?¹⁸ Since the regime did not create clear rules regarding the turnover of power, nor assume – for external and internal consumption – the figure of the dictator, as was the case in Chile, the conflict around succession always tended to be the sharpest and most difficult of the entire military period. (Martins Filho, 1995)

On the side of society, the institutional evolution of the regime is at a first moment directly linked to repression (both in terms of degree and of its "favorite clientele"). This is followed by a second moment in which the central point is the process of liberalization. Once censorship has been abolished, political prisoners have been freed, amnesty has been conceded, *habeas corpus* has been guaranteed, and two-party system has been revoked, what tasks remain for legal opposition? Where can the limits of contestation be found? What, from the point of view of the political and military group at the forefront of regime change, remains non-negotiable?

The question of internal *organization* is, naturally, a question of the specific arrangements of the institutional system of the apparatuses of the State. How to provide order (and later, coordinate) the relationship between the civil and military parts of the state system? How to forge new structures of authority? What criteria should be used to recruit the State elite? How to organize decision-making processes? What is the limit of military influence over political questions? And so forth.¹⁹ These problems become all the more delicate when it is kept in mind that, as part of the more general process of the "hypertrophy of the State" in military dictatorships, a series of almost infinite

¹⁷ This topic was discussed by Linz, 1964, in relation to Franco's Spain. Cardoso prefers to speak of the "authentification" of the regime rather than its political legitimacy. (Cardoso, 1972)

¹⁸ For a particularly illustrative discussion of this problem, see Gaspari, 2004.On the first question, see Cardoso, 1975, Lafer, 1975 and Codato, 1997.

¹⁹ Cardoso notes that, during the "authoritarian regime", conflict between the Executive and the Legislative branches was dislocated to the Executive and there was a real competition between "technocrats" and the military regarding decision-making. (Cardoso, 1982)

"administrative" maladjustments and organizational distortions unfold. Regarding *bureaucracy*: the ill-definition of the functional boundaries between branches of the State; the juxtaposition of functions and responsibilities, which becomes an almost infinite source of bureaucratic conflict; the expansion of prerogatives and overflowing of spheres of responsibility that generate new sites of tension; sharpened inter-bureaucratic competition launched by the movement to take over new political spaces and new power resources on the part of specific agencies; and, lastly, the transformation of bureaucrats: the strengthening of bonds with external (i.e. social) "allies" as a support mechanism to be widely used in internal political struggles; the articulation of alliances between segments of the bureaucratic apparatus and its clientele, generating privileged arenas and a personalistic style of management, and so forth.²⁰

The final question – what, after all, is the direction of political change? – reveals the need to distinguish between certain changes (of degree) that can be introduced *within* the political regime without signifying the transformation *of* the regime into its opposite (a change in its nature, so to speak). The higher echelons of the military that direct the "transition" process have, as we can assume, completely vested interests only in the first alternative. This means *institutionalization* of the dictatorial regime but under another "political form". It is, paradoxically, authoritarianism without a dictatorship. The crucial matter is that the decision-making process remained centralized within the Executive (while the military continued to control, albeit at a distance, the real centers of power), the activity of political parties remains restricted to electoral periods, the power of the Legislative remains little more than ornamental and, as Luciano Martins reminds us, the expression of a "popular will" does not imply any type of autonomous participation on the part of society (Martins, 1979-1980, p. 31)

Nonetheless, the step toward the institutionalization of authoritarianism dos not mean that the dictatorial regime was little or not at all institutionalized,²¹ but that the institutional arrangement that was in effect was neither functional nor stable, thus giving rise to frequent political crises (1965, 1968, 1974, 1977, 1981 etc.); therefore, the institutional arrangement that was in effect would have to be reformed in order to handles these crises, without implying a "populist" (pre-64 type) regression nor a democratic advance.

These are not the only parameters for an analysis of the political history of the political regime. And surely more complete answers to these questions cannot be elaborated within the limited space available here. Nonetheless, perhaps a few brief answers may serve as a guide in understanding the overall meaning of the periodization outlined above, and, most importantly, identify certain historical determinants that contribute to an explanation of the substitution of an "authoritarian regime" by authoritarianism, in consonance with my hypothesis.

²⁰ For a general vision of these issues, see Martins, 1985 and Abranches, 1978. For an analysis of several cases, see Lima Jr. & Abranches, 1987. For a discussion on the theme of "transition" as related to these problems, see Diniz e Boschi, 1989.

²¹ For Linz (1973), on the contrary, this was only an "authoritarian situation".

V. THE DYNAMICS OF "POLITICAL OPENING" IN BRAZIL

The most general premiss for the analysis of the dynamics of the "political opening" in Brazil is that the revocation of dictatorial political regimes and the re-establishment of democratic, semi-democratic, or semi-dictatorial forms of government are not necessarily carried out through their overthrow, by way of a coup d'état or even through the rise of popular movements (Poulantzas, 1975). These changes can also come about as a result of - as in the Brazilian case - processes of evolutionary change. Thus, Schmitter suggests that the transition to democracy involves two possibilities: either (i) there is a "transfer of power" from the military to politicians allied with the regime, or (ii) there is a (negotiated) submission of the military to the politicians who represent a moderate opposition to the regime. (O'Donnell and Schmitter, 1988) In the Brazilian case, there was a bit of both, and really of neither. The military did not "transfer" all its power to the government party (Arena, and then later, the PDS). Rather, they kept strategic positions within the State apparatus and maintained ability to veto certain initiatives of civilian politicians on constitutional and institutional topics, as occurred in the 1980s (comparison with the Argentine case here speaking for itself). The conciliation promoted by the political elite was so wide that once the alternative for regime transformation via the electoral route had been defeated, in 1984, both representatives of the regime and of its opposition formed, in 1985, the first civilian government, following its approval by the armed forces²².

It should be kept in mind that the re-establishment of democratic forms of government is only one of the possible results of the political transformation of "authoritarian regimes". (Martins, 1988, p. 108) As Moisés suggests, "the transitions from 'non-democratic' regimes in the seventies and the eighties [...] began as transitions from authoritarianism to some 'other thing', but there was nothing there to assure that this 'other thing' [were] necessarily a democratic regime." (Moisés, 1994, p. 88) The teleological temptation that is present in some studies that attempt to identify in the political transition a course heading toward the goal that in the last instance would be the true fulfillment of liberal democracy can be tricky at least two ways. In one sense, because certain analysts presuppose that the strategic objective of the military who lead the process is (was) the "re-establishment of democracy". In the second, because they free themselves from the need to evaluate remaining authoritarianism in the institutions of the new regime, as well as the evaluation of if and how such vestiges can affect institutional structure and democratic political dynamics. At this point it would be wise to avoid comparative constitutional studies.

V.1 The content of political change: liberal institutions, authoritarian practices

²² With the defeat of the movement for a return to the popular vote for the presidency, the Electoral College met on January 15, 1985 and elected Tancredo Neves (PMDB) by 480 votes against the 180 votes for Paulo Maluf (PDS). Shortly thereafter, Tancredo fell ill; thus, he never assumed the presidency. In his place, Jose Sarney assumed executive office (March 15, 1985). Sarney was a former leader of the party that supported the military regime (ARENA).

The original project of the military faction that took over hegemony of the political process after 1974, the "*castellistas*",²³ represented by two generals, Ernesto Geisel and Golbery do Couto e Silva, was much more of a "political change" than a "political transformation." The change was meant to bring about a *liberalization* of the dictatorial regime but not necessarily the *democratization* of the political system. (Stepan, 1988, p. 12-13)²⁴ Whereas in Spain, the "democratic transition" followed a *conditional* course – each democratic institution introduced in the political system demanded (conditioned) in turn other democratic institutions –, in Brazil the course of political change was sequential: certain *classical liberal rights* were re-introduced, following an incremental and moderate strategy, under the direction of the government and with the collaboration of the opposition, in order to avoid the risk of authoritarian regression. (Skidmore, 1988, p. 323-325)²⁵ Regarding the differences between Brazil and Spain, Share and Mainwaring (1986) establish a useful parallel on the mode of political change in both countries with regard to the mode of political transition that they refer to as "transition through transaction" in order to emphasize the negotiated character of the processes.²⁶

The Geisel government (1974-1979) proposed détente (i.e. a relaxing) in the political controls held over society. Previously implemented censorship was partially suspended, and electoral results, after a certain amount of manipulation of the rules,²⁷ were admitted, entrepreneurs' protest against the "economic model" were regarded with tolerance, albeit reserve, and the unexpected workers' mobilization that began in 1978 were an

²³ The expression "*castellistas*" refers to followers of Castello Branco, the first president under the Brazilian military dictatorship. Commonly, though in my view erroneously, these "*castellistas*" are associated with "liberal" positions and their rivals in the Armed Forces, the "hard-liners" are seen as radicals. Nonetheless, I think that the division between these two groups that is most faithful to the facts should associate the first group with the institutionalization of the regime and the second, with the management of repression. It should be kept in mind that it was the "liberals" of the army who created the *Serviço Nacional de Informações* (June, 1964) and who edited the Institutional Act n.2 (October, 1965) which suppressed political parties and determined that presidential elections were to be, as of that moment, indirect. They were also the ones who promulgated a new Constitution (January, 1967) and closed the National Congress (April 1977) introducing a series of measures ("casiutries", according to the expression used at that time) in electoral legislation. Oliveiros Ferreira (2000) proposes another division between the two main ideological and political currents of the Armed Forces: the "military establishment" (i.e. those who acted in accordance with constitutional legality) and the "uniformed party" (*partido fardado*) (i.e. members of the military who were willing to intervene in politics in order to establish constitutional law and order).

²⁴ Regarding the difference between these two processes and their possible interaction, see O'Donnell & Schmitter, 1988.

²⁵ The more general design of the reformist program can be found in Santos. (1978, p. 143-211) In a paper entitled *Estratégias de Descompressão Política*, Santos emphasized the need to reestablish some liberal political rights, through a gradual and moderate strategy, with the collaboration of the opposition, in order to avoid risks of a possible authoritarian regression. The first measure to be taken was the elimination of censorship and the guarantee of freedom of expression. For a concrete analysis of the mechanisms through which censorship functioned during the Brazilian military regime, see Soares, 1989.

²⁶ Santos (2000) demonstrated that, through similar courses, the two transition processes had the same results: the prevalence of the Executive over the Legislature. A comparison of re-democratization in Spain, Brazil and Argentine can be found in Schmidt, 1990. For a discussion of the methodological implications of this type of comparison, see Bunce, 2000.

²⁷ In order to understand a series of "casuistries" that altered the political process thanks to the manipulation of the electoral system (with results not always favorable to the dictatorial regime) see Fleischer, 1986.

unexpected effect of the liberalizing actions. This project was maintained, with controversial actions and under opposition from the extreme right, throughout the Figueiredo (1979-1985) government, under the name of a "politics of opening". This process, which would only come to a close in the Sarney administration (1985-1990), was without a doubt peculiar: the "political transition" (from 1974 a 1989) ironically lasted longer than the regime itself (1964-1974), and its fundamental characteristic was the exceptional continuity that it represented in terms of authoritarianism (Martins, 1988) in the institutions of government that were supposed to represent a "government of transition". Stepan and Linz have suggested that "the uncommon lengthiness of the Brazilian transition", when compared to that of other countries of more or less the same period, is related to "the fact that the authoritarian regime [...] was hierarchically controlled by a military organization that had enough power to control the pace of transition and to exact a high price for its withdrawal from power." (Linz and Stepan, 1999, p. 205)²⁸

This refers basically to the political side of the strategy. The military side should also be considered. One of the most important (and difficult) tasks of the change in political formulae was the gradual disengagement of the Armed Forces in the daily conduction of State business and its return to its customary role as guardian of domestic order. One of the main ingredients of this politics was the strengthening of the Presidency and the affirmation of the latter's authority over the various groups and factions that made up the military corporation itself, especially those that controlled the organs of security and had acquired considerable freedom of action (or as it was called, "operational autonomy") under previous administrations, acting as a power parallel to that of the State. (Quartim de Moraes, 1982, p. 771; Gaspari, 2002b) There is one more peculiarity here: the victory of the military President over the military corporation thus occurred through an increase rather than a decrease in authoritarianism. This is why the dismissal of the Minister of the Armed Forces (Sylvio Frota) in October of 1977 can be considered one of the most influential occurrences in this process (Gaspari, 2004),²⁹ indicative of a shift in the *form* of political change.

V.2 The Method of Political Change: Centralization and Control

The motto of the Geisel government was, as is well-known: a "slow, gradual and safe" political opening. This political procedure was to take long enough as to guarantee that there would be no pretexts for an open impugnation of the extreme right that could

²⁸ Unless I am mistaken, Alfred Stepan was the first author to suggest the importance of the maintenance of "authoritarian enclaves" (directed by the military) in the State apparatus, even after what the majority of authors refer to as "democracy" (i.e. the Sarney government) went into effect (see Stepan, 1986). For further information on the possibility of Armed Forces' supervision of the constituent process (1987-1988) see Aguiar (1986) cit. by Zaverucha e Teixeira (2004, p. 409).

 $^{^{29}}$ General Geisel dealt successfully with the three military crises that shook his administration: he dismissed the commander of the Second Army (1976) [*Segundo Exército*], exonerated the Minister of the Armed Forces (1977) e immediately accepted the resignation of the head of the *Casa Militar* (1978). For more on this issue see Oliveira, 1980.

be taken as a retreat from the "Revolution" and thus serve as a pretext for open contestation by the extreme right, military and civilian. It was also to be gradual, i.e. progressive and limited so as not to simply clear the way for an offensive on the part of the opposition that could lead to a democratic rupture; (Quartim de Moraes, 1982, p. 766-767) and under the control of the President himself, since the two above-mentioned tasks demanded strict supervision of the political action of the military right and the parliamentary left. This is the only way to reconstruct the meaning of Geisel's pendular strategy: swinging back and forth from the right (suspension of political rights), to the left (elections).³⁰

Nonetheless, as was emphasized above, the original *project* of liberalization of the dictatorial regime was not identical to the political process that it launched. Once underway, the movement acquired a logic of its own and the various crises in the Geisel and Figueiredo governments can clearly be seen in relation to the presidents' attempts to reinforce their control over the process and the opposition's (civil and military) attempts to move the project in a different direction. The complication was more or less the following: if "political détente" under military tutelage was the only form that the power elite could imagine to resolve the contradictions of the military apparatus and the "military regime" itself, "political opening" allowed definitively for the intervention of the national business class, the middle classes and the workers in politics. Thus, the phases and stages indicated in the periodization presented above cannot be reduced exclusively to the political and bureaucratic dynamics of the military apparatus (i.e., the internal struggles, ideological disputes or warring among different personalities).³¹ To a large extent the periodization of the dictatorial regime also corresponds to three arrangements: (i) to the new geography that was established between politicians and the military, in which elections are the best indicator of the growing importance of "civilians" on the political scene: (*ii*) to the redefinition of the relation of forces between social classes (Cruz e Martins, 1983) in which the passage of the hegemonic position from one fraction of a class (multinational industrial capital and associated national capital) to another (finance capital) are illustrative of the new contradictions between "government" and "entrepreneurs"³²; and (*iii*) to the redefinition of the relation of forces between classes and the military establishment, as demonstrated by the growing protests of the workers and middle class professionals (lawyers through their professional organization, the OAB, journalists through the ABI, etc.). Furthermore, albeit indirectly, workers' strikes and the rise of social movements represent the new pace of the "rebirth of civil society".33

³⁰ General Golbery do Couto e Silva, President Geisel's chief advisor, described this process with a silly metaphor: the successive changes of the political system as it attempts to adapt to the conflicts that are part and parcel of the dynamics of transition can be thought of as "systoles" e "diastoles". See. Silva, 1981.

³¹ For a clear view on this issue, see Oliveira, 1994. Gaspari (2002a; 2002b; 2003; e 2004) presents a detailed history of the contradictions present within military institutions.

³² On this shift in hegemony, see Saes (1990). For a critical evaluation of the literature regarding conflicts between the Brazilian bourgeiosie and the military Executive power, see Codato (1995).

³³ There is a large stock of literature on this topic. See Sader, 1988, in particular.

Data on the elections for the legislature (state and federal) illustrate the evolution of the parliamentary opposition, suggesting their growing importance within the political system.

Given the regime's maintenance of the institutions of classical representative democracy (parties, the parliament and elections),³⁴ our understanding of the transformation of the political system necessarily includes analysis of the influence of electoral dynamics over the political process in the decades of the 1970s and 80s. The tables below (tables 1 and 2) summarize the results of elections for the legislature in Brazil between 1966 and 1986. If we divide the votes into two opposing currents, the government (ARENA) and the opposition (MDB), the following results emerge:

	Federal Senate		Federal		State Assemblies				
				Repr	esentat	ives			
Years	AREN	MD	B/N	AREN	MD	B/N	AREN	MDB	B/N
	Α	В		А	В		Α		
1966	44.7	34.2	21.2	50.5	28.4	21.0	52.2	29.2	18.6
1970	43.7	28.6	27.7	48.4	21.3	30.3	51.0	22.0	26.8
1974	34.7	50.0	15.1	40.9	37.8	21.3	42.1	38.8	18.9
1978	35.0	46.4	18.6	40.0	39.3	20.7	41.1	39.6	19.3
1982*	36.5	50.0	13.5	36.7	48.2	15.1	36.0	47.2	16.8

Table 1. Official results of the legislative elections, by political party – Brazil,1966/1982 (%)

Source: Tribunal Superior Eleitoral.

Notes:

1) ARENA: Aliança Renovadora Nacional; MDB: Movimento Democrático Brasileiro; B/N: null votes.

^{2)*} PDS votes were artificially included together with the ARENA votes and those of other parties of opposition to the regime (*Partido do Movimento Democrático Brasileiro (PMDB)*; *Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT)*; *Partido Democrático Trabalhista*, (PDT) and the *Partido Trabalhista Brasileiro (PTB)*) placed together in the column "MDB".

³⁴ O'Donnell & Schmitter argue that the Brazilian regime "was not characterized by any serious attempt to *create* authoritarian institutions"; the military governed "resorting to the *distortion* rather than the *destruction* of the basic institutions of political democracy." (O'Donnell & Schmitter, 1988, p. 46, my emphasis)

	Federal Senate			Federal			State Assemblies		
				Representatives					
Year	'AREN	'MD	other	'AREN	'MD	other	'ARENA	'MDB'	others
	A'	B'	s	A'	B'	S	,		
1986*	18.4	81.6	-	29.5	68.3	1.7	30.4	66.2	3.4
*									

 Table 2. Official results for the legislative elections by political parties – only valid votes Brazil, 1986 (%)

Source: Nicolau (ed.), 1998, p. 56-58; 95; 173-175.

Note: PDS/PPR(Partido Progressista Renovador), PFL (Partido da Frente Liberal), PL (Partido Liberal) e PDC (Partido Democrata Cristâo) votes were included with those of the ARENA; votes of the opposition parties (PMDB, PT, PDT, PTB, PSB (Partido Socialista Brasileiro) PCB (Partido Comunista Brasileiro) and PC do B (Partido Comunista do Brasil)) were included with those of the MDB. These two associations – PMDB and ARENA – were extinguished in 1979.

As should be noted, what was only meant to have been a liberal façade for a dictatorial regime became a powerful element that added dynamics to program of the transition process, particularly in the early 1980s. A quick inspection of the numbers presented in the two tables above allows four conclusions to be drawn: (*i*) the votes for the government party were, over time, inversely proportionate to those of the opposition party (*ii*) although the growth rates of the opposition vote are different in the three legislative houses (greatest in the Federal Senate and least in the state Legislative assemblies), they are almost constant; (*iii*) at the end of the first time sequence (1982) the opposition has almost 50% of the electorate, against 36% of the government party; (*iv*) the only moment in which the sequence is modified (1970) corresponds exactly with the growth of null and blank votes, which was at that time the only way of protesting the regime. Thus, in 1979, the "recognition of the government's inability to secure a solid base of parliamentary support made the dissolution of the two-party system imperative" in 1979. (Kinzo, 1988, p. 224)

It is probable, as Lamounier (1986) argues, that the electoral scenario was more important in the Brazilian case than in those other "transition" processes occurring elsewhere in Latin America in the seventies. Nonetheless, we should not ignore the other side of the coin. Saes emphasizes that the privileged place for opposition to the military dictatorship was not, for all social classes and fractions, "the political party scenario (since the MDB, the party contrary to the government, kept its distance from popular movements)". The instrument of the modern working class was, in fact, the trade union. Thus, "the most effective form of protest taken by the opposition [...] was not the vote but the strike". (Saes, 1984, p. 227)

Table 3 presents a useful indicator for measuring society's disassociation with the regime and its economic model.

Year	Total of	Average number of workers	Days not	Average days of	
	strikes	stopped*	worked	work stoppages	
				(%)	
1978	118	1,868	2,162,903	6.5	
1979	246	9,777	26,627,083,	6.6	
1980	144	9,012	24,225,695	7.4	
1981	150	6,107	6,545,003	8.8	
1982	144	4,934	6,967,215	5.9	
1983	347	3,689	28,407,743	4.4	
1984	492	2,946	13,311,365	3.9	
1985	619	11,016	90,637,512	6.3	
1986	1,004	5,181	49,525,864	5.8	
1987	2,193	4,187	132,445,423	8.2	

Table 3. Total number of strikes, average number of workers not working,workdays not worked and average of days of work stoppages – Brazil (urban areas),1978/1987

Source: NEPP/UNICAMP, 1989, p. 129-131 (data selected from Tables 1; 2; 3 and 4)

* Industrial workers, construction industry workers, middle class wage earners, service sector workers and other professional categories were considered here.

Parallel to the evolution of opposition parties, the two latter military governments (Geisel e Figueiredo) were obliged to deal with more modern forms of political organization, the "new unionism".³⁵ This challenge was part of a wider context and is related to the process of the restructuring of the system of representation of social interests within the State. For the time being, it is enough to note that in this period, trade unionist dynamics and politically party dynamics interact, without this implying any relationship of determinism between them

Looking solely at the column, "total number of strikes" on table 3, we can suppose that, over this period of 10 years (1978-1987), the leap from 118 strikes (in 1978) to 2,183 (in 1987) must have made an impact on the process of regime change. Nonetheless, the most important information here is the ten-fold increase in the number of striking workers between 1978 and 1979. Although he carries his argument a bit too far, Diniz (1986) seems to be correct in saying that the "political opening" was a result of two dynamics that acted simultaneously on the political system: the dynamics of *negotiation* within the realm of the elite and the dynamic of societal *pressures* (working class, middle classes) on the military State. It may be possible to suggest here that while the first

³⁵ In short, the "new unionism" was a new form of workers' organization in terms of its relationship to official state trade-unionism (created in the post-1930 period) and a different manner of raising its wage demands, The main issue was the attempt to negotiate directly with bosses, rather than through the Ministry of Labor as intermediary. For an optimistic view of the phenomenon, see Maroni, 1978; for a general analysis of the evolution of the new trade unionism from the seventies to the eighties, see Keck, 1988. Alongside this phenomenon, there were also new urban social movements that appeared at the end of the seventies. A good historical perspective on this issue can be found in Ottmann, 1995.

dynamic established the content, defined the mode and imposed the character of the transition, the second determined its pace.

V.3 The Reasons for Political Change: A Regime in Perennial Crisis

The political processes that are the root of the 1974 reform of the dictatorial regime are not identical to those that prevailed when it began, in 1964. (Martins, 1979-1980, p. 19) Each one of them corresponds to a specific political crisis, though in both cases the Armed Forces is the main protagonist.

If we are able to associate the emergence of the military dictatorships in Latin America to two types of factors, one that is *structural* – corresponding to the need for the reorganization of the model of capitalist accumulation in the periphery (O'Donnell, 1975) - and the other, *circumstantial* - that is, having to do with the way the Brazilian military perceived the situation as social chaos and bureaucratic disorder necessitating their intervention (Soares, 1994)³⁶ – we must still keep in mind that the reasons for changing the form of government in 1974 have more to do with the internal difficulties of the "military regime itself". Difficulties that originate in the military branch of the state apparatus, (Dreifuss and Dulci, 1983) have repercussions in the Armed Forces and through them spread to other apparatus and branches. Therefore, the reformist proposal of Geisel-Golbery should not be associated with more global factors such as "social" or "economic" crisis. The economic crisis (measurable, for example, through the increase in inflation and disequilibrium in the balance of payments) ran *parallel* to the dictatorship's attempts at self-reform. The social crisis (represented by both the negative results of the politics of "income distribution" and by the reaction to the latter - strikes) was revealed through the liberalizing effects of the dictatorship's strategy of self-reform.

This does not mean that the military dictatorship was stable. In Brazil, for example, the dictatorial regime never reached a satisfactory state of political balance between liberal politicians, conservative leaders and military reactionaries. There was also no consensus among the military itself, given that the existence of different rival groups in the Armed Forces was indicative of the presence of several ideological projects, mainly with regard to the *nature* – provisional or long-lasting – and the *objectives* – broad or restricted – of its intervention in national political life after 1964.

For this very reason, the Brazilian regime had a hard time establishing a definitive institutional formula. It was, as frequently occurs in these cases of political regimes of exception, a regime in permanent crisis. (Poulantzas, 1975) The very absence of a clear rule for the presidential succession of military chiefs is an indication of the unresolvable conflict between a political model that attempts to preserve a civilized image – unwilling to resort to the classical figure of the "Latin American dictator" – and the impossibility of "civilizing" State command (that is, hand the Presidency over to a trustworthy civilian politician). The classical problem of consensus or coercion – the degree to which there is social consent and the intensity of State repression – were also the reason and expression

³⁶ For an elegant formalization of this explanation, see Geddes (2001, p.233-235).

of the difficulties in creating its own political institutions. Lack of control over "what went on in the basement" (CENIMAR, DOPS, DOI-CODI etc.)³⁷, although appearing as "anarchy" (according to Gaspari, for example) was the more or less normal or possible form for combating a real opposition (armed struggle) or imaginary opposition ("the communists") at that particular juncture. In turn, the cost of producing an active consensus that could approach legitimacy would depend heavily on cycles of economic expansion, with pro-dictatorship and "civic and moral education" publicity campaigns serving as modest examples of the fabrication of a dominant and effective authoritarian culture that was nonetheless very different from the exalted nationalism of the Vargas period.

In short, I believe that the absence of order/hierarchy among the different branches of the State apparatus and the precariousness of the regime's own system of ideological justification (as for example that of the *Estado Novo* period) was due basically to three combined problems: *(i)* the difficulty of building a "rational" structure for decision-making, as the frequent "administrative reforms" of the State show;³⁸ *(ii)* the absence of ideological coherence and cohesion among the different *civilian and military* groups that commanded national politics;³⁹ and *(iii)* the inexistence of clear and institutionalized set of rules for institutional evolution, whose most apparent symptom was the uncertainty regarding who would be at the head of government, how power would be exercised and in what direction the regime should move.⁴⁰

In view of this, it is possible to speculate that the strategic objective of the liberal reconversion of the authoritarian regime was, thus, an *institutionalization* of a series of authoritarian mechanisms (Quartim de Moraes, 1982, p. 766) that would guarantee, after the cycle of the military generals was finished, the legitimacy, stability and functioning of a new political model that would be neither "populist" nor fully "democratic", given the existing risks of the latter turning into the former, again. Just as had been the case, in the view of the Armed Forces, of the regime of the 1946 Constitution.

V.4 The Meaning of Political Change: The Institutionalization of Authoritarianism

³⁷ Centro de Informações da Marinha; Delegacia de Ordem Política e Social; Destacamento de Operações de Informações – Centro de Operações de Defesa Interna.

³⁸ The decision-making system corresponded to a variety of arrangements that reflected the correlation of forces within the (civil and military) bureaucracy. For more on this matter, see Lafer, 1975; Martins, 1985; and Codato, 1997.

³⁹ Among the military there were internationalists (in favor of a more "open" market economy) and right-wing nationalists (in favor of an industrially developed "national economy") There was also a liberal civilian sector that had supported the military coup – in their view, the "counter-revolution" that stopped "the establishment of a tradeunionist republic in the country, with Fidel Castro's visible support" – but saw the deepening of political repression as of 1968 as "an unfortunate authoritarian turn" away from its original goals. See. "30 anos depois". (1994, p. A3.)

⁴⁰ Regarding this last point, General Hugo Abreu's testimony (1979) is illuminating.

The military governments did not invent their own institutions of political representation, as, for example, a party that mobilized the masses. The "political party reform" of 1965 (the AI-2) was limited to canceling the registration of the earlier parties that had been created after the "*Estado Novo*" (1937-1945) period and to re-organizing the pro-regime and anti-regime factions under just two parties: the ARENA e MDB. Similarly, the system of interest representation did not promote a "classical" corporatism (as had been the case under the 1934 Constitution) but was also unable to find the ideal formula for the reconstruction of the links between "society" and the "State", in an anti-liberal context. Particularly in this case, the link between certain sectors of the business class and certain centers of decision-making in the State apparatus were perfected during the Costa e Silva and Medici administrations in accordance with the same model of technical councils that had been employed under Vargas' authoritarianism. Nonetheless, this system, given the distortions it created in the State system (Balcanization, fragmentation, entropy, etc.) was revoked under the Geisel government and then restored and widened during the Figueiredo administration. (Codato, 1997)

Although these two pieces of evidence confirm the dictatorship's precarious hold over the edification of a juridical and political structure, they do not justify the claim that Brazil was experiencing a "authoritarian situation." (Linz, 1973) Nor should the periodic crises and the instability characteristic of the dictatorial regime from there derived be considered an indicator of the incipient and transitory nature of the "political model". There are two points of confusion in this reasoning. One, that associates a lack of constancy with low levels of institutionalization, and another that links institutions with processes of institutionalization. The presence or absence of certain institutions is less important than the function that they assume in concrete political dynamics. We can begin with the two-party system. Conceived of in order to discriminate and control allies and dissidents, its functioning over time – once a more or less fixed electoral calendar had been established and several political offices had been made available through electoral competition – was over time both a factor of stability (until 1974) and a factor of instability for the regime (from 1974 on)⁴¹.

However, since the main executive offices were never put up for dispute (the presidency, state governorships, mayoral offices in capital cities), the political crises that the electoral dynamics produced were not enough to annul the fundamental trait of the dictatorial regime: the Armed Forces' political monopoly. The impossibility of "alternating power" between civilian groups (even the most conservative) and the military is the most certain reference for the institutionalization of the regime. When at the beginning of the Geisel administration there was an impulse to modify the regime it was not, as Cruz and Martins have argued "a project of institutionalization of the *authoritarian regime*, that foresees the establishment of liberalizing measures but only to the extent that they serve its purposes". (Cruz and Martins, 1983, p. 46; my emphasis) Rather, this was the institutionalization of *authoritarianism*, or better put, the

⁴¹ This is the case, for example, of the elections for the Federal Senate, which took on a plebiscitary and anti-regime character. See Table 1 above.

institutionalization of certain mechanisms for control of society by the State. In the tortuous words of President Ernesto Geisel himself:

"The exceptional instruments that the government is armed with for the maintenance of an atmosphere of safety and order [...] I would like to see not so much as a long-listing or frequent exercise but rather as a potential for repressive action or more vigorous contention, just until they have been superseded by a creative political imagination that is capable of establishing effective safeguards and efficient remedies ready for use within an institutional context, just as soon as that becomes opportune." (Geisel, 1974, p. 5)

The creative political imagination that was put into practice led to the following result: at the end of 1978, the National Congress approved Constitutional Amendment no. 11 (to the 1967 Constitution) which conjugated certain political reforms with the maintenance of "effective safeguards". It abolished Institutional Act no. 5, reestablishing *habeas corpus*; it suspended radio and television censorship, revoked capital punishment and life term prison sentences; restored independence to the Judiciary and so forth. Yet at the same time, it guaranteed the executive its discretionary powers. In place of AI-5, certain "safeguards in defense of the State" were written into the Constitution, such as the "state of emergency". The president was given the right to declare a state of emergency without previous congressional approval. In contrast with the AI-5, the president was no longer able to make laws, but parliamentary immunity was not completely reestablished. Although the chief of the Executive could no longer terminate mandates and suspend political rights, members of the parliament could be tried by the dictatorship for what were deemed cases of "crimes against national security".⁴²

This problem of the institutionalization of authoritarian mechanisms of control over State power, in light of an eventual loss of command over the political process in the case of a possible, though still uncertain loosening of authoritarian controls, had been on the order of the day since the early 1970. When General Geisel's group came to power, they had already dismissed the option of a corporative regime, as had been defended by Medici administration advisors between 1970-1971. They had also dismissed the idea of transforming the *Aliança Renovadora Nacional* (ARENA) into a dominant party in the style of the Mexican PRI, following the proposal made by Samuel Huntington. (Skidmore, 1988, p. 321) The prevailing option was to establish a more stable, controlled and predictable form of government, in which the system of political parties and electoral routine – which in the seventies had surprisingly become a powerful means of protesting against the regime – would not hold authoritarianism in check, nor provide opportunities for the "excesses" of the "populist" period manifested by the advance of popular mobilization under a "charismatic and demagogic leadership".

 $^{^{42}}$ The entire project can be found in the news daily *O Estado de S. Paulo*, Sept. 21, 1978. These institutional reforms, that should have entered into effect on March 15, 1979, were put into effect in advance, on January 1st, even before the inauguration of the new president.

When all has been said and done, considering the conservative nature of the process of political transition in Brazil, its restricted objectives and authoritarian means, it is no surprise to find that same political group remains in power after 1985 even when this required its political transformation. Nor is it a surprise that the whole process was guided and executed by the same association of professional politicians and authoritarian generals. The longevity of the ARENA-PDS-PFL triad on the political scenario⁴³ makes it hard for us to forget that there was no real substitution of the groups linked to the dictatorship, but rather a re-accommodation within the realm of the elites, with the Armed Forces taking backstage while not losing their prerogatives, such as veto power.⁴⁴

The Sarney administration (1985-1990) was the culminating point that demonstrated how this iron circle was able to maintain successful control over political change in Brazil. It is worthwhile here to remember the words of order of the *Aliança Democrática*, "conciliation" and "social pact", that were able to neutralize both the attempts to oppose the dictatorial regime that emerged in the particular 1977-1980 conjuncture (workers' strikes, grass roots social movements and entrepreneurial protests against "State intervention in the economy"), at the time of the famous campaign for direct presidential election, in 1984. The result was the perfection of an anti-popular and anti-populist regime or, as Florestan Fernandes called it, a "strong democracy", that is, a political form that was neither explicitly dictatorial (to the point of being fought against as such), nor completely liberal and democratic. (Fernandes, 1981, p. 10)

Thus, the decade of the eighties consummated the generals' dreams: a "relative democracy", to use General Geisel's curious expression Thus, it would be correct not to characterize the Sarney government as a government of "transition" (to democracy) or a "mixed" government, but as the last government – in this case, civilian – of a cycle of non-democratic governments in Brazil.⁴⁵ Saes (1988) has correctly suggested that it is possible to think this way as long as we give up on analyzing "separately – that is, one by one – the "political institutions" that were brought back through the process of political opening, relegating the question about the type of relationship that these institutions had to others" (Saes, 1988, p. 18).

A series of typically democratic political liberties or institutions may be present even within a dictatorial regime. The central question asks what precise *function* the pluralist party system or the majority elections have. During the Sarney administration, these institutions fulfilled the function of "hiding the ultimately militarized nature of the state decision making process." (Saes, 1988, p. 19) Zaverucha (1994), in this same vein, has convincingly demonstrated that the Sarney administration maintained the political

⁴³ For a more detailed account of the electoral success of right wing parties in Brazil during this period, see Mainwaring; Meneguello & Power, 2000

⁴⁴ Carvalho argues – in my view, correctly – that "The Brazilian Armed Forces were not forced to accept a role that was radically different from the one they had held during the authoritarian phase, in which they were more responsible for the implementation of public policies and influence over the positions taken by all other social actors." (Carvalho, 2004, p. 136)

 $^{^{45}}$ The suggestion to characterize the Brazilian regime as a mixed one – in which liberal and authoritarian institutions are combined – belongs to Martins (1977).

prerogatives of the military and "the authoritarian enclaves within the State apparatus", thus contributing to the establishment of a "tutored democracy".⁴⁶

This proposition has two analytical implications. Not only the *liberalization* of the dictatorial regime should not be confounded with the *democratization* of the political system, but the liberalization imposed by the higher echelons of the military was "more a factor of continuity than of the collapse of the dictatorship". (Fernandes, 1981, p. 28) There was no actual rupture with authoritarianism but a transformation – slow, gradual and secure – of forms of government. McSherry (1995) has argued that the Latin American military institutions preserved the organization culture of the Cold War period and its national security defense ideology. In Brazil, the principles behind Law of National Security is still in effect and the Federal Constitution of 1988 guarantees the role of the Armed Forces in maintaining "Law and Order" in the country.⁴⁷

VI. AN AUTHORITARIAN DEMOCRACY?

During the decade of the nineties, most analyses of the democratization of the regime disassociated political and institutional transformations from the changes within the apparatuses of the State.

Public discussion, whether in the academic or political milieu, took on some very specific questions, such as *political parties' structure* (and their low level of institutionalization), the *party system* (and their high level of fragmentation) the *electoral system* (its "disfunctional" proportional formula with its open list), *the system of government* (federalism and the competition between the states), *form of government* (presidentialism and its improprieties), and *intergovernmental relations* (competition between Executive vs. Legislative powers), etc. The literature's almost exclusive focus on the political scenario brought the (conservative) theme of governability to the forefront of public debate. Inspired by a minimalist definition of democracy, this topic then became the fundamental problem of the process of government, eclipsing the problem of the transformation of the State system.

The question of the State and its "crises" was, in turn, more associated with the problem of the "efficiency" (of public expenses) and its solution – the "reform of the State" – more wedded to an administrative (or managerial⁴⁸) perspective, than to essential

⁴⁶ On the "tutelary" role of the Armed Forces, see Oliveira (1987). For a comparative vision of this problem between Brazil, Argentina and Spain, see Zaverucha, 1992. For a similar argument, see Camargo, 1990. Barros (1988) during the debates that were going on in the Constitutive Assembly that drafted the 1988 Constitution, criticized over juridical views on the "constitutional" role of the Armed Forces and the formalist attempts to block political intervention or military coup by legal means. Saint-Pierre and Mathias (2001) gathered together a series of studies discussing the sucess or failure of attempts at civil control over the military during processes of political transition in seven Latin American countries.

⁴⁷ According to the 1988 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Brazil, "The Armed Forces, made up the Marine Force, the Army and the Air Division, are permanent and regular national institutions, organized on the basis of hierarchy and discipline, under the supreme authority of the President of the Republic, and committed to national defense, the guarantee of constitutional powers and, through the initiative of any of the above, to the maintenance of law and order". (Brasil, 1988)

⁴⁸ See Bresser Pereira (2001, p. 2) for whom the change in the form of management of "public administration" was a correlate of the democratization of the political system: "In synthesis, at the political level we moved from an

aspects of the reconfiguration of the relations of force/influence between the state system and its apparatuses of power. To a certain extent, concern with the relationship between the Executive and the Legislative or, more properly, with president's ability to make decisions and implement them,⁴⁹ took priority over concerns with the Executive itself, or specifically, with the internal dislocations of relations of force between the apparatuses of the State, relegating the identification of new centers of real power (and those who control them) and their links to social interests to a secondary level.

An important dimension of the institutional legacy of the military dictatorship over governments of the nineties was the permanence of the specific nuclei of power within the Brazilian State. These nuclei had both large degrees of independence and no political (i.e. parliamentary) or social (i.e. public) control. In the Cardoso administrations (1995-1998; and 1999-2002), to take the best example, we can find three specific expressions of this phenomenon. In the economic arena, just as under the dictatorial arrangements, the scheme of a "super ministry" (today represented by the triad made up the Central Bank, the Council on Monetary Policy and the Ministry of Finance)⁵⁰ continued to function. In the military arena, three untouchable "bureaucratic fiefdoms" were maintained: the Office of Institutional Security (previously, Casa Militar), the Brazilian Information Agency (ex-SNI, or Servico Nacional de Inteligência) and the Military Justice department⁵¹. Lastly, in the "entrepreneurial sphere", i.e. those State apparatuses in which, due to their nature or competence, "market interests" are managed (policies on privatization, on transportation, on foreign trade, communications, education, etc.) the rule followed was that of direct contact by influential representatives of the world of big business with strategic decision-makers, a not very transparent mechanism that Cardoso (1975) had referred to, with regard to its presence in the authoritarian regime, as "bureaucratic rings" ("anéis burocráticos").

If these similarities between certain aspects of the organization of the state system in two different regimes are not only formal, as they really do not seem to be, why does this occur? This non-democratic pattern of relationship persists for a basic reason. When the agenda of the Fernando Henrique Cardoso administration is inspected, the famous "market-oriented reforms" are salient, i.e. the privatization of State firms, de-regulation

oligarchic to a democratic (democracy of elites) State; at the administrative level, we moved from a patrimonial to a managerial State.

 $^{^{49}}$ According to Palermo (2000), there are four different interpretations on how to understand the legislative process (and thus, the nature of the new political regime) to be found in the literature: (*i*) the president competes with the Congress; (*iii*) the president excludes the Congress; (*iiii*) the president forces Congress to cooperate, and (*iv*) the president negotiates with Congress. In this last case, governability depends on the formation of wide coalitions.

⁵⁰ Loureiro & Abrucio have observed that "[...] the Ministry of Finance became the main nucleus of power in the presidential cabinet, particularly during Fernando Henrique Cardoso's first term in office." (Loureiro & Abrucio, 1999, p. 70) However, for these authors this was a result of the demands of governability. In order to deal with the effects of "clientelismo" – since the distribution of positions is the method *par excellence* used to guarantee a parliamentary majority – the Ministry of Finance had to be elevated to the status of "the highest organ, controlling the entire ministerial sphere, spreading its logic over all the other ministries through formal and informal mechanisms" (p. 85).

⁵¹ On the autonomy and degree of militarization of the ABIN, see Antunes (2002). Regarding the actions of the High Military Tribune and the difficulties they posed for real democratization, see Zaverucha and Melo Filho (2004).

of spheres once regulated by the State, rigorous control over inflation and the public deficit, the re-dimensioning of "social expenses" (in the areas of education, health and social welfare), commercial and financial opening, etc. In truth, economic reforms did not require a real reform of politics that would increase representation, and of the State, that would increase participation. Or better said: the neo-liberal reforms had as their precondition the authoritarian arrangements of processes and lack of accountability on the part of those who governed. This is why the implementation of such policies did not come together with demands for the widening of citizenship and social control over the State, its bureaucracies and its apparatuses of power.⁵² Thus there was a continuity between (liberal) ideological discourse and (authoritarian) political practices that was expressed in the insistence on exclusive devotion to building the social hegemony of neo-liberal capitalism rather than new forms of democratic political legitimacy. The deficit in citizenship is only the most visible aspect of this process.

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 $^{^{52}}$ Martins (2005) characterizes the political regime at the end of the transition process in the following manner: "What we have before us is unremarkable: it is just a normally functioning liberal regime – with one reservation, that the purity of its liberalism is tarnished by a bit of corporatism and technocratism. If we remove these stains – which of course, are not democratic at all – we are left with just a common case of liberal pluralism." (2005, p. 19) For a conclusion opposite the one that is proposed here, see Sallum Jr., 2003.

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