

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

JCB:31 Interview with a
young politician

Prudente de Morais 805, c/6
Ipanema, Rio de Janeiro
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Mr. Richard Nolte
Institute of Current World Affairs
366 Madison Avenue
New York 17, New York

Dear Mr. Nolte:

During the April 1st Revolution garbage trucks surrounded the Governor's Palace to guard Governor Carlos Lacerda from Rio-based troops considered loyal to Lacerda's arch-enemy, João Goulart. Now, on a lovely spring day, it seemed hard to imagine it as a refuge in a revolution. Just a few blocks from the Presidential Palace, it is a stately building with large windows, open staircases and high-ceilinged rooms, elegant to live in but impossible to defend.

I was here to interview Senhor Rafael de Almeida Magalhães, since the Revolution Vice-Governor of the city-state of Guanabara (Rio de Janeiro) and Governor Lacerda's right hand man. He had been governing the city during Lacerda's trip to Europe and the United States just after the Revolution and, a handsome young man, had made quite an impression on the cariocas.

Ushered through a maze of corridors and elegantly-carpeted rooms (in which I got lost when leaving unattended) I found Sr. Almeida behind his desk in a relatively narrow modern wood-paneled study. Although I had passed a number of other people waiting to see him he greeted me warmly with "my time is at your disposal" and spent a leisurely two hours telling me about himself, his work and the importance of the Revolution.



Sr. Rafael de Almeida
Magalhães

A very young 34, dark, intense and full of nervous energy, he had a cigarette constantly in hand and continuously doodled on a pad in front of him while we talked. He entered politics, he said, because of Carlos Lacerda whom he had met about ten years ago when Lacerda was still a journalist and he was a law student at the Catholic University in Rio. His first involvement in politics was in the 1955 election when Lacerda successfully stood for a seat in the Federal House of Deputies.

In this same election Juscelino Kubitschek, political heir of former dictator Getulio Vargas, was chosen President. Vargas had committed suicide in August of 1954 as the result of a crisis brought on by the attempted assassination of Lacerda by a Vargas aide. Cafe Filho, who succeeded Vargas, sought to bring an end to the corruption and drift of the Vargas era but Lacerda and the other anti-Vargistas feared that Kubitschek's election would bring all this to an end. After an unsuccessful attempt to keep Kubitschek from the presidency, Lacerda fled to the United States where he asked Rafael de Almeida to join him in early 1956. Lacerda returned to Brazil a few months later when he found that his seat as Federal Deputy had not been declared vacant. Rafael followed soon afterwards, returned to law school and graduated later in the year. Then he went to work for the Tribuna de Imprensa, the newspaper Lacerda had founded.

He rejoined Lacerda's staff in 1958 at about the time Juscelino Kubitschek tried to have Lacerda expelled from the House of Deputies because he had violated the state's secrecy by obtaining a code used by Itamarati, the Brazilian Foreign Office. When Lacerda successfully ran for the Governorship of Guanabara in 1960 Rafael handled the administrative side of the campaign. Up until the time he was made Vice-Governor in April he was Secretary of the State's Planning and Reorganization section. This was a key post since it dealt not only with the preparation of the state's annual budget but with the creation of a new state administrative system to replace the inadequate one left by the move of the Federal District to Brasilia in 1961.

The position of Vice-Governor had been held by a Goulart supporter and an opponent of Lacerda. He was removed from office by the revolutionary forces. Then, when Lacerda planned to make a trip soon after the Revolution, it was necessary for him that there be a Vice-Governor to whom he could turn over control with complete trust. Rafael de Almeida was chosen in a hotly disputed election even now being contested in the local court. (Lacerda's active legislative opposition declares that the election was illegal and that all laws signed by Rafael in Lacerda's absence are thus null and void.) While Rafael was reluctant to give up his key Planning post to become Vice-Governor he said, "Someone had to cover the Governor's back while he was away."

It is possible that he will have to do the same more than once in the future. There is talk of extending the term of office for State Governors to coincide with that of the President which has been extended from January 1965 to March 15, 1967. With federal and state elections held at the same time there would be no election campaigning in the interim to disturb the present Government's attempts to put Brazil's economic and political house in order. Lacerda, whose term ends this year, says he is opposed



Governor Carlos Lacerda entering his barricaded Palace during the Revolution

to such an extent and will step out of office at the end of his term. He can safely make this gesture knowing that his state administration will remain secure since it would pass into the hands of his trusted Vice-Governor.

Since ex-President João "Jango" Goulart had made things as difficult as possible for Lacerda in running the state of Guanabara, I was very interested in the picture Rafael presented of the deposed President. "Goulart was not a communist," he stated, "but he did enable the communists to come in. They infiltrated labour and university student organizations as well as the military. He looked on these groups as the basis of his support and as he lost the confidence of the business leaders he sought out the workers more and more. He was a demagogue. He blamed others for inflation; 'the foreigners', 'the reactionaries', were at fault; 'the rich want to become more rich'. He created a struggle between classes and the communists helped him and handled him. He used labour strikes and the threat of strikes to get his way. The result was the paralyzation of industry. He practically closed our ports to foreign investors. During the time he was in office exports dropped radically and inflation drove the cost of living way up.

"There was such a fear in people, caused by rising costs, rapid inflation and the seeming break down of law and order that they were not sure where or how it would all end. Brazilians are usually gay but they were not under Goulart.

"The military has always been the democratic overseer in Brazil. It steps in only when it appears necessary to prevent the collapse of the Brazilian constitutional system. And it will not step in until its leaders believe that they will have the support of the people. Although there were many military men upset at the direction of Goulart's Government they waited until they felt the people wanted them to intervene. This is one reason why the 'Revolution' was virtually a bloodless one.

"Immediately after the deposition of Goulart the political power was still in the hands of the civilian politicians. But how would it be possible to have a new President who was one of them? The possible civilian candidates were already candidates for the Presidential election, then scheduled to be held at the end of 1965, and each had a partisan backing which would divide instead of unite the people. Thus the President had to be a military man, above politics. Marshal Humberto Castelo Branco was selected because he was the most civilian-minded of them all. He is highly respected even by those who disagree with his program. So respected is he that even most of his close associates address him not in the familiar second person but the more formal 'you'."

Although today thinking is in terms of "the Revolution" and the kind of "revolution" the Government should be making through its acts and measures, the view that Goulart's quick overthrow was one was something that was projected onto the event after the fact. The three top military leaders (Army, Navy and Air Force) went to great lengths to explain that what had occurred was a "revolution" and because it was, the military had a legal right to promulgate such drastic measures as the "Ato Institucional" giving the President sweeping dictatorial powers. People considered corrupt or subversive by the Government were either picked up and held in prison or, as in the case of ex-President Kubitschek, were deprived of their right to vote or to hold office for ten years. The right to execute these drastic measures expired on June 15th but until October 9th sufficient powers remained to remove people from their jobs in the military, universities and state and federal governments. And there are indications that these pressures will continue. The Act also gave the President power to rush legislation rapidly through Congress and to enact measures with little or no Congressional approval. All this has been to insure, as far as the revolutionists are concerned, that the housecleaning begun by President Cafe Filho will be finished this time.

But there have been increasing differences of opinion among them about how this can best be done. Rafael de Almeida explained: "There was no revolutionary party; only what can be called 'revolutionary forces', civilian and military. Some of them wanted the Government's revolutionary power to get rid of people they considered harmful to the country; communists, Vargaistas and corrupt politicians. Others wanted the Government to concentrate its efforts on the quick passage of political, economic and agrarian reforms with or without the approval of Congress. Disagreements have come up over the 'purgues'. Some people feel they have gone too far and others that they have been too limited and have not gone far enough. There are differences concerning the nature of the reforms. For instance, there were some for the extension of Castelo Branco's term, some were against it; some were for the extension of the vote to illiterates, others forced the Government to accept defeat of such a measure; some are for the take-over of American and foreign power companies and others feel it will cost too much money.

"The major problem is that the Revolution does not yet have a proper political machine. For it to be permanent in its housecleaning and program of reform there must be a revolutionary political party. At present none exists and the lack of any organization makes for continual disagreements. This is why serious thought is being given to the reduction of our political parties to two or three along with a general political realignment . It is very much needed since political parties here have too much familial composition; the same leaders year after year."

Political parties are a recent thing in Brazil. They came into existence with the end of the Vargas dictatorship in 1945 and with the adoption of the new constitution the following year. Of the four major parties (there are 13 in existence today) three have Vargas foundations. The Partido Social Democratico (PSD) was organized by Vargaistas to help get General Enrico Dutra elected President in 1946. It is considered the right-wing of the Vargas movement representing some business elements helped by Vargas plus the landlord political bosses in the country's large rural areas. The Partido Trabalhista Brasileiro (PTB) was established by Vargas' Ministry of Labour officials and represents the left-wing of the Vargaistas. Although governmental "operators" guide the party instead of union leaders most of the workers support it as their party. The Partido Social Progresista (PSP) is the personal vehicle of the Governor of the State of Sao Paulo, Dr. Aedemar de Barros who was once a Vargas appointee. The União Democratica Nacional (UDN) was organized out of the common front against Vargas and represents the conservative middle class professional and business people. It is Lacerda's party.

Except perhaps for the now-banned Partido Comunista do Brasil (PCB) none of the existing parties can be associated with any definite ideology or view-point; more often they center around a personality. And each party varies from state to state, region to region, so that it is only possible to describe them and what they represent in a very general way. Castelo Branco has tried to work beyond the limitations of any political party and his followers number portions and personalities from different groups. But even within the UDN, the party which more than any other identifies itself with the Revolution, there is considerable disagreement over what, when and how the revolutionary reforms should be accomplished. Thus even the various lines of opposition are often difficult to identify politically.

The newspapers have made much of the dis-satisfaction of so-called "hard line" revolutionists. Rafael told me, "There are several hard line groups. It is often difficult to say on what they agree or what they all want. Some of them confuse not punishing people with softness. Generally, however, it includes those who feel the Revolution is at present too comfortable, that the initiative has passed from the hands of President Branco to a Congress still dominated by Vargaistas and Jangoistas and that enough stringent measures have not been taken to prevent the return of the old ways after the expiration of Branco's term. They want Branco to act decisively to ensure that this does not happen. And to do this they believe he has to realize that the present Government is not a normal one, as he tries to make it, and that these are not normal times.

"Branco has decided to run the country on as non-authoritarian a basis as is possible and in this sense it seems non-revolutionary to some hard-liners. He has sought popular support in and out of

Congress for his proposed measures. He has met with leaders of all political parties, those that supported Goulart as well as our own. He was talked into the extension of his presidential term but he has tried to lessen the purging exuberance of revolutionaries on the local and state levels. He cut the initial proscription list from thousands to only 400. He has opposed the furtherance of the harsh measures of the Institutional Act.

"The talk of the hard-liners taking over Branco or pushing him to one side is ridiculous. Branco is the unifying factor between them all. If there is to be a dictatorship now in Brazil it will have to be with Castelo Branco, but he doesn't want it. He wants to return our country to normalcy, to restore political balance and he believes this cannot be done unless he and Congress work together.

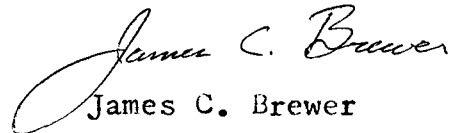
"Yes, Governor Lacerda has criticized the Government. But not Castelo Branco for whom he has the highest regard. It is that the Governor differs with some of the Ministers on policy. He is not against the economic policy, for instance, but only the fiscal program. He believes not enough attention has been given to the problems of supply. Inflation cannot be controlled, he believes, unless there is an ample supply of basic commodities, for then, shortages, artificial or real, cannot drive up the price of the cost of living.

"We believe the Government is succeeding in its overall effort to stabilize the economy against inflation. There are already symptoms of curbing inflation. Exports, for instance, have begun in items which we have never exported before. Banks now have more money than people want or need. (This is difficult to believe since the Minister of Finance, Sr. Otavio Bulhoes is reported to have stated that several billion more cruzeiros would have to be put into circulation before the end of the year) "They may even reduce the present interest rate from 6% to 5% a month. This would be extremely important to the country psychologically."

When I asked him about newspaper criticism of the United States for not giving enough aid to Brazil at a time when the country needed it most he answered by praising the States for its financial help. The real problem as far as he was concerned was to get through the American red-tape. "You are much more bureaucratic than we. It takes so long to get a project started after it is thought of. Sometimes it is a year and a half or two years after our plans have been approved before we begin to receive the needed money. It is a struggle. But our State of Guanabara has been helped greatly by the United States in housing, schools and the improvement of electricity, water and sewage disposal facilities." (The figure is over 45 million dollars).

Rafael says he would like to get out of politics for a while. "I'm still a young man and I want to gain experience in my profession as a lawyer. I would also like to see something of the world." But it seems almost certain that he will stay to aid Lacerda as long as Lacerda wants and needs him and that he will continue to be a part of the political life of his country.

Sincerely yours,


James C. Brewer

Pictures courtesy of Manchete

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