

17 **AIRGRAM**

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HANDLING INDICATOR

TO : Department of State

INFO : Belem, Belo Horizonte, Curitiba, Port Alegre, Salvador, Recife, Sao Paulo

FROM : AmEmbassy Office BRASILIA

DATE: Nov. 7, 1967

SUBJECT : President Defends Political Status Quo at Press Conference

REF : Brasilia 1368, Rio's 2973 and 3059; Brasilia's A-84 of November 3, 1967

1. On October 27 President COSTA E SILVA wound up a five day period of governing from Minas Gerais with a press conference where he replied to selected questions submitted in advance. His main comments concerning nuclear energy, the F-5, and economic matters were reported in refuels. This airgram contains a summary of his remarks concerning internal political matters.

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2. Brazilian Democracy: Costa e Silva felt that democracy had already been attained in Brazil, but this did not mean license, which he defined as liberty without authority. He pointed out that democracy also meant responsibility on the part of all national groups and particularly mentioned the press in this regard. He had no complaints against the parliamentary opposition which he felt was fulfilling its constitutional mission. The fact that the opposition was free to express its opinions proved to him that democracy was functioning. Some desperate politicians (read Carlos LACERDA, et al) were trying to create disorder and hinder the execution of constructive national tasks, but public opinion was indifferent toward them. His administration was not worried about their activities which could not succeed in diverting serious governmental efforts to bring about national well-being and tranquility.

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Clearances:

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Asked if he would guarantee that those elected at the national/state levels would take office even if they were in the opposition, Costa e Silva responded that the question would better be put to those who were masking themselves as democrats and defending direct presidential elections as the panacea for all existing ills.

3. Civilian and Military Government: Referring to the next presidential election, Costa e Silva said either a civilian or military man could be elected. He was sure, however, that neither the parties nor the electoral college would select a man who was not capable of continuing the policies of the Revolution. The government was now making use of military reserve officers because it needed their technical and general capabilities to accomplish its tasks.

4. Constitutional and Party Reform: The President stated that constitutional reform was the task of the Congress. He noted that the administration's party had a large majority in the Congress and that it generally agreed with his personal point of view that the Constitution should not be amended until tried out further. Regarding party reform, Costa e Silva said the sub-legenda (sub-party) and vinculação (linked or straight party voting) proposals were matters for ARENA to decide at its national convention. The President felt all of the most powerful national political trends were reflected within the present two-party system.

5. Links with the Castello Branco Administration: Costa e Silva declared that his administration's mission was to consolidate the "revolutionary tasks" begun by Castello Branco and to accelerate economic development. It was clear, he said, that the Castello Branco government had had to shoulder much more onerous tasks than the present one--particularly the fight against inflation and the re-establishment of discipline and the Hierarchy. Because Castello Branco had made so much progress in these sectors, the second revolutionary government was able to loosen the reins somewhat and increasingly emphasized development. Speaking of the Administration's wage policy, he asserted that holding down inflation was more important to wage earners than raising their salaries.

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6. Comment. Bland and confident in manner, the President made clear at the press conference that he was not prepared at present to countenance any basic changes in the existing political system. Costa e Silva's acknowledgement that either a civilian or a military man might succeed him was

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