
3 LIBERALISM

Theory and Practice

The first task of the men who took power after independence was to replace colonial institutions with others more adequate for a newly independent nation. They were not inexperienced men, confronting for the first time problems of politics and administration. In fact, most were like José Bonifácio—men over fifty, with impressive records of public service—men who had served the Portuguese Crown in many capacities during the colonial period and were well prepared to do their job.

Among those who sat in the National Convention were many priests—something to be expected in a country where the Church had had the monopoly of culture and churchmen had played an important role in administration. Others were public functionaries or professionals—lawyers, doctors, teachers—most of whom had received their degrees at the University of Coimbra or some other university in Europe, since there was no university in Brazil. There were also merchants and plantation owners. But whatever their social origin or professional affiliation, the delegates to the National Convention were linked by family or clientele to the export-import groups and represented an elite closely tied to agriculture and trade. It was according to the interests of these groups that they organized the nation.

Attributing the instability of other Latin American countries to their republican form of government, the Brazilian ruling classes had adopted in 1822 a constitutional monarchy with which they had hoped to create unity and political stability. Haunted by the specters of the French Revolution and the Haitian rebellion, they had a deep suspicion of both monarchical absolutism and revolutionary upheavals and were determined to curtail the power of the emperor and to keep the masses under control. In European liberalism they found their main source of inspiration.

Brazilian liberalism, however, can only be understood by reference

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game. Thus, liberalism served the English bourgeoisie to strengthen its position in the government, the Russian nobility to fight the czar, and the French "populace" to send the nobles to the guillotine.

At different times during the nineteenth century, liberal ideas were used by different people with different purposes. But wherever liberals took power their main challenge was to translate their theory into practice. And everywhere in this process liberalism lost its original revolutionary meaning. Rights defined as universal became the privilege of a minority, the minority of those with property and power. And everywhere economic and social structures set the limits of liberalism and the conditions for its critique.

It is impossible to analyze here all the contradictions involved in this process. For our purpose it is enough to remember that the critique of liberalism appeared in Europe in the first half of the nineteenth century, when it became clear that an oligarchy of capital was replacing the oligarchy of birth. The first attacks on liberalism came from the stronghold of traditional privileged groups, the second from the ranks of the working class.

In Brazil the main supporters of liberalism were, as we have seen, men whose interests were related to the export-import economy. Many of them owned large tracts of land and slaves and were interested in keeping the traditional structures of production while freeing themselves from the grip of the mother country. The economic and social structures Brazilian elites wanted to maintain meant the survival of a clientele and patronage system and of traditional values which represented the very essence of what European liberals were fighting against. Finding a way to deal with this contradiction (between liberalism and slavery and patronage) was the greatest challenge Brazilian liberals had to face. Liberal discourse and liberal practice in Brazil revealed this permanent tension.

The colonial status of Brazilian economy, Brazil's peripheral position in the international market, the system of clientele and patronage, the use of slave labor, and the delayed Industrial Revolution—which happened in Brazil only in the twentieth century—all those circumstances combined gave to Brazilian liberalism its specificity, defined its issues and contradictions, and set the limits for its criticism. In other words, liberal theory and liberal practice in nineteenth-century Brazil can be explained by the peculiarities of the Brazilian bourgeoisie and by the absence of the two other classes which in Europe were the bourgeoisie's necessary point of reference, the aristocracy and the proletariat.

Contrary to what has sometimes been suggested,² the Brazilian elite's commitment to liberal notions was not a mere gesture of cultural

to Brazilian reality. Brazilian liberals imported liberal principles and political formulas but tailored them to their own needs. And since the same words may mean different things at different times, we have to go beyond a formal analysis of liberal discourse and relate liberal rhetoric to liberal practice in order to define the specificity of Brazilian liberalism.¹

In Europe, liberalism was originally a bourgeois ideology, intimately related to the development of capitalism and the crisis of the seigniorial world. Liberal notions were born out of the struggles of the bourgeoisie against the abuses of royal authority, the privileges of the clergy and the nobility, the monopolies that inhibited production, and traditional obstacles to free circulation, free trade, and free labor. In their struggle against absolutism, liberals defended the theory of social contract, stressed the sovereignty of the people and the supremacy of the law, fought for the division of powers and for representative forms of government. To destroy corporate privilege, they made freedom, equality before the law, and the right to property universal rights of men. And to the traditional regulations that inhibited production and trade they opposed free trade and free labor. Although rooted in an expanding capitalist economy and in the experience of the bourgeoisie, the liberal message was universal enough to appeal to other social groups that, for one reason or another, felt oppressed by institutions of the ancien re-

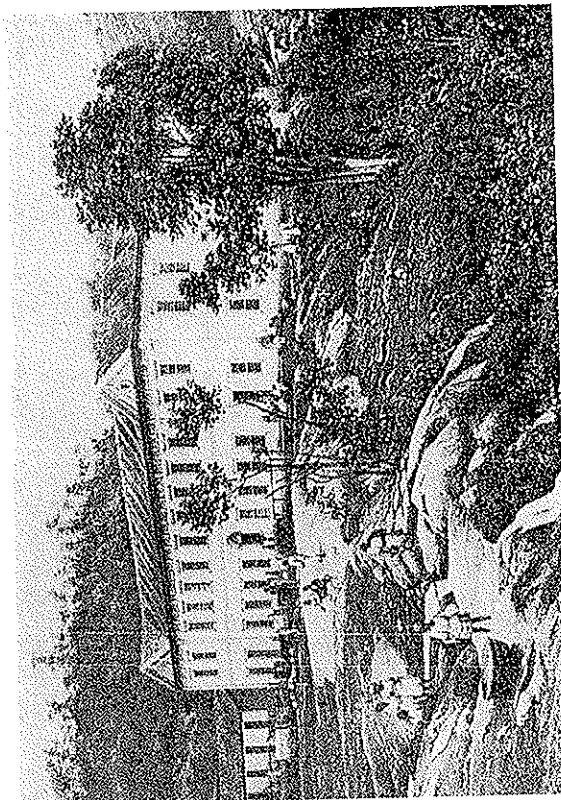


FIG. 4. Fazenda do Secretário in Vassouras

tion preferred another type of fiction. When the Constitutional Charter was granted by the emperor in 1824, there was no mention of slaves, and although Article 179 of the Constitutional Charter defined freedom and equality as inalienable rights of men, millions of blacks continued to be enslaved.

The Brazilian elites' expectations and the limits of their liberalism were expressed in the manifesto addressed by the regent to the Brazilian people in 1 August 1822, a manifesto apparently written by Gonçalves Ledo, a man perceived by his contemporaries as an authentic liberal and a leading figure in the movement for independence. It started by accusing the Portuguese Côrtes of trying to reestablish the Portuguese monopoly over Brazil by closing the Brazilian ports to foreigners, of plotting to emancipate slaves and to arm them against their masters, and of destroying Brazilian agriculture and industry, and of reducing the Brazilian people to the situation of pupils and colonists. After those virulent attacks on the Côrtes, the manifesto laid down a liberal program promising legislation adequate to local circumstances, honest judges that would put an end to the trickeries of the Portuguese Courts of Justice, a criminal code dictated by "reason and humanity" to replace the "bloody and absurd existing laws," and a system of taxation that would respect "the sweatings of agriculture, the labors of industry, the hazards of navigation, and freedom of commerce," and that would "facilitate investment and circulation of assets." To those who cultivated science and letters, "abhorred and despised by despotism, the stimulant of hypocrisy and imposture," it promised freedom and "a liberal education" for the citizens of all classes.⁵

The proclamation of independence a month later brought to an end the heroic age of liberalism. From that moment on liberals confronted the difficult tasks of converting ideals into realities. They had reached their first and most important goal: to emancipate the colony from the mother country. Their second goal was to secure control of the nation for themselves. In their struggle to assert their hegemony they met not only with the emperor's opposition but also with the hostility of the masses.

The conflict between the emperor and the Brazilian elites broke out in the first meeting of the National Convention. The gap between the convention and the emperor only grew with the passing of time. The liberal opposition was relentless in its attacks against the emperor. It criticized his favoritism toward the Portuguese, condemned the lack of freedom of the press and protested against the arrest of political dissidents by the government. Those who tried in the National Convention to speak in favor of the emperor were vehemently rebuked by their

mimicry, an expression of a colonial and peripheral culture subordinated to European ideas and to the European market. Liberalism was not just a fancy of the Brazilian elites and liberal slogans were not just badges they used to mark their "civilized" status, although for some people it may have been just that. For most people, however, liberal ideas were ideological weapons to reach some very specific political and economic goals.

Initially liberal ideas were an instrument of the Brazilian colonial elites in their struggle against the mother country. In this early stage liberals were politically revolutionary and socially conservative. Their struggle—a struggle which in Europe was against royal absolutism—in Brazil was primarily a struggle against the colonial system. Freedom, equality, sovereignty of the people, self-government, free trade—all those high-sounding words and phrases so dear to European liberals—had specific connotations in Brazil. To fight for freedom and equality meant to fight against Portuguese monopolies and privileges and against the restrictions Portugal imposed on production and circulation. To fight for freedom of expression meant to fight for the right to criticize the colonial pact. To fight for the sovereignty of the people was to fight for a government independent from the arbitrary favors and impositions of the Portuguese Crown.³

Liberal notions also appealed to slaves, who dreamed of emancipation, and to the urban lower classes, who hoped to abolish privileges that wealth had created and the Portuguese government had legitimized. Thus the conflicts of interest that opposed one class to another could be temporarily hidden behind what seemed to be an all-encompassing utopia, and the elites' goals could be presented as the goals of all. This momentary illusion, however, would soon be dispelled. That the elites and the masses had opposite goals became clear at the time of the first conspiracies for independence, when the aspirations to equality and freedom on the part of blacks and mulattos, enslaved or free, were met with indifference if not hostility by the elites. The most pathetic instance of the confusions and deceptions engendered by liberal rhetoric occurred in 1821, when slaves, hearing rumors that a constitution was about to be enacted, gathered in large numbers in Ouro Preto and surrounding areas to celebrate their long-awaited freedom. They soon learned that their celebration was premature.⁴ With the exception of a few odd individuals, the Brazilian elite was not prepared to abolish slavery and did not perceive any incompatibility between liberalism and slavery. Some even suggested that the constitution include a paragraph saying that the "contract" between slaves and masters would be respected! But those who finally wrote the consti-

nobility. Together with the councillors of state (who were also appointed for life) they constituted a powerful group, envied and respected. Since their support was often decisive for obtaining a loan from a bank, a position in the bureaucracy, a government pension, approval for a joint stock company, or the success of a political career, they created a large clientele.⁷

Second in rank, but sometimes as powerful, were the members of the Chamber of Deputies. Although elected for a period of only four years, they often managed to be reelected for several legislatures and were appointed to important administrative positions. Many found in the Chamber an easy road to the Senate and to the Council of State. Like the senators and councillors of state the deputies belonged to a political network of clientele and patronage which they used to their own advantage and to the advantage of their friends and clients.

What gave exceptional powers to these politicians, particularly to the members of the Council of State, was the excessive centralization of the Brazilian political system that subordinated the provinces to the central government, municipal governments to the provinces and placed the judiciary, the church, the army, and the business community at the mercy of the politicians. The central government controlled tariffs on imports and exports, the distribution of unoccupied lands, banks, railroads and stock companies, and decided on labor policies and loans. Until 1881 no liability company could be created without permission of the Council of State. The central government was not only the regulator but the protector of native and foreign enterprises, authorizing or prohibiting their functioning, providing subsidies, guaranteeing interests, establishing priorities, giving tax exemptions. Although liberal in its inspiration and phraseology, the Constitutional Charter consolidated a system of patronage that dated from the colonial period.⁸ It also gave to Catholicism the status of a national religion, prohibiting the public worship of other denominations and giving the Catholic church the right to control birth and marriage registers and cemeteries.

Another peculiarity of the 1824 charter was to include an article reproducing almost word by word the Declaration of the Rights of Men issued in France in 1789. There were, however, a few curious but very revealing omissions. The article that in the original French version read, "The nation is the source of all sovereignty; no individual or body of men can be entitled by any authority which does not expressly derive from it," was dropped. Also lacking was Article VI: "The law is an expression of the will of the community." And in Article II, "The goal of all political association is the preservation of the natural and

peers. The tension increased during discussions of the procedures to be adopted for the appointment of provincial governments and became even more serious when some representatives suggested that the ministers be put under the direct control of the legislature. This threat to his powers did not please the emperor, who became even more irritated when some recommended that the army also be put under legislative control. The last straw on this already critical relation came during the debates about the emperor's right to veto—a right most liberals wanted to reduce to a minimum and a few went as far as to deny altogether. The conflict between the elites and the emperor ended momentarily with his victory in 1823, when he sent troops to dissolve the National Convention and ordered the arrest of several representatives, sending some into exile.⁶

In contrast with this behavior, typical of an absolutist king, the emperor himself granted a Constitutional Charter the year after. This gesture was an attempt to reconcile his interests with those of the Brazilian elites. The charter followed closely the project drafted by the National Convention and the Council of State, but, as one might expect, reinforced the emperor's powers. According to the charter, he was responsible for the implementation of the legislation approved by the Parliament and for the appointment and promotion of high personnel in the civil, military, and ecclesiastical bureaucracy. He also had the final word in the distribution of resources among the different administrative branches and could grant titles of nobility and other personal benefits in reward for services to the Crown. Following the colonial tradition of royal patronage he had the right to give or deny permission for the implementation of papal bulls. In addition to his executive prerogatives, the emperor enjoyed others issuing from what was called the moderating power by which he could choose his ministers independent from the Parliament, and adjourn, prorogue or dismiss the Chamber, calling for new elections. He could also appoint the members of the Council of State and choose the senators from among the three candidates who received the most votes in a senatorial election.

If the 1824 Constitutional Charter gave considerable power to the emperor, it also created conditions for the formation of a powerful oligarchy. Senators were appointed for life and since the age requirement for the senate was forty, they could stay in power for many years. At the end of the empire, five senators could boast of having been in the Senate for over forty years. Besides, senators were often chosen to be members of the Council of State (a body created to advise the monarch), members of cabinets and heads of political parties. During the First and Second Empires 40 percent of the senators received titles of

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imprescriptible rights of men and these rights are liberty, property, security, and resistance to oppression," the last four words were suppressed. These omissions may be explained by the fact that this was a charter granted by an emperor, not a constitution written by the "representatives of the nation." But they expressed as well the anti-democratic tendencies of the Brazilian elites.

During the debates in the National Convention and many times after it became clear that the Brazilian elites were profoundly anti-democratic. Most representatives would have endorsed the words of Henriques de Resende, an ex-revolutionary of 1817, a man who, in spite of his revolutionary and republican traditions declared himself in the National Convention to be "an enemy of democracy."⁹ It is not surprising that men who so emphatically expressed their hostility toward democracy would choose an electoral system based on indirect elections and income qualification, denying suffrage to most of the Brazilian population. Throughout the First and Second Empire, the electoral system would be controlled by a minority. In spite of several electoral reforms (1846, 1855, 1862, 1876, and 1881), the electors continued until the fall of the empire to represent between 1.5 and 2 percent of the total population. Such a small number of people could be easily manipulated.

In spite of the effort to accommodate liberalism to Brazilian realities, the gap was obvious, particularly to those like Saint Hilaire who traveled in the country at that time.¹⁰ The Brazilian constitution stressed the equality of all before the law and guaranteed individual freedom. But the majority of the population remained enslaved and excluded from citizenship. The constitution protected the right of property. But most of the rural population (when they were not enslaved) lived as tenants on land they could not own. The constitution secured freedom of thought and speech. But throughout the First Empire and the reign of many people lost their lives for believing in the constitution. The law established measures to protect the individual and to guarantee the inviolability of the home. It endorsed the principle that nobody could be arrested unless charges were brought, and it stipulated that no one could be sentenced except by the relevant authority and in accordance with the terms of the law. But for a few mil reis, anyone could hire a *capanga* to kill an enemy. The autonomy of the judiciary was guaranteed by law, but in fact the courts were instruments of the upper classes. The constitution abolished torture, but the slavemaster was the supreme judge on his plantation, and in the slave quarters stocks, manacles, whips, and fetters continued to be used throughout the nineteenth century. The constitution abolished legal discrimination

and guaranteed to all the right to be appointed to any position on the basis of merit and talent. But the bonds of blood, friendship, and godparenthood, typical of the patronage system, always prevailed over the criteria of merit and competence.

Politics, in those circumstances, was more a matter of family arrangements and family rivalries than ideology. Elections were controlled by local bosses who through a system of clientele and patronage were able to deliver votes to their favorite candidates. Their support carried an obligation of reciprocity. Thus behind the liberal facade, personal influence, personal loyalties, and reciprocal favors were the real ingredients of power. Political rhetoric was subordinated to the opinion of those few who controlled the electorate. From time to time an aspiring politician tried to make a career by raising issues which might sound too radical to the ears of the ruling classes. But if by some chance he found a place in the Chamber of Deputies, he would moderate his radicalism.¹¹ Those who persisted in their radical stances were condemned to political ostracism. This situation changed only in the last decade of the Second Empire, when economic growth and the emergence of new groups of interests created new constituencies. But even then, because of the constraints of the electoral law, the great majority of the Brazilian population continued to be denied suffrage and politicians continued to depend mainly on elite support.

Although the political, social, and economic structures were conducive to the creation of a political oligarchy, its consolidation was the product of struggles that lasted for more than two decades after independence. During these years three factions struggled for power: one more conservative, favoring centralization and initially supporting the emperor; another more liberal, intending to increase the power of Parliament; and a third, more democratic, supporting decentralization, universal suffrage, and nationalization of trade. The first episode in a long series of confrontations among these different groups and between the elites and the emperor was triggered by the dissolution of the National Convention in 1823, and the granting of the Constitutional Charter in 1824. Several uprisings occurred then in the Northeast and the Northeast (Confederação do Equador) where the local elites, fearing the loss of their political autonomy and resenting their subordination to the central government in Rio, rebelled. The insurgency of these local elites created an occasion for other social groups to express their discontent. The rebels raised the banner of federalism and criticized the excessive power the Constitutional Charter had granted to the emperor.¹² One of their most eloquent spokesmen was Frei Canéca. In his newspaper the *Typhis Pernambucano*,¹³ Canéca argued that Bra-

zil's conditions, its size, the variety of its resources and inhabitants, were more compatible with a federation than with a centralized government. He also condemned the appointments of senators for life and the creation of a nobility. The moderating power seemed to him "a Machiavellian invention," a "master key to oppression." The provincial councils created by the charter to govern the provinces were in his opinion nothing but "ghosts to deceive the people." Most of all, he questioned the emperor's right to grant a Constitutional Charter usurping the people's rights to express their sovereign will through their representatives in the National Convention.

Canéca's critique exemplifies liberal rhetoric at this juncture. In the name of those issues people rose in Ceará, Pernambuco, Paraíba, Rio Grande do Norte, and Alagoas. The Confederação do Equador was put down by troops and the heads of the rebellion, including Frei Canéca, were condemned to death.

Repression and punishment, however, did not put an end to the issues raised by the revolutionaries of 1824. The conflict between the emperor and the elites, the central government and the provinces, the national and local elites, had not been solved. When the Chamber of Deputies met in 1826, the conflicts surfaced again, now aggravated by the divergencies within the elites themselves. The organization of the educational system, land legislation, abolition of the slave trade, freedom of the press, naturalization of foreigners, military recruitment, freedom of worship, the organization of provincial and municipal councils, the composition of the judiciary—these were the issues that divided the representatives into two opposing groups: one more liberal, the other more conservative. Liberals were in favor of a system of education free from religious control, of land legislation that would lead to the breaking down of the monopoly of land by a few. They opposed military recruitment, supported freedom of worship, favored decentralization, and provincial and municipal autonomy. Conservatives were on the opposite side of the spectrum. But although it is possible to identify these two positions by reference to ideal models of what was to be a conservative or what was to be a liberal, in reality it is impossible to find total consistency in any particular individual or group. There were men like José Bonifácio, liberal in their approach to social and economic programs but conservative in regard to political organization. And there were others who were conservative in matters of economy but politically liberal. In the Parliament, however, the predominant tone was conservative.

Whether they were liberal or conservative, the Brazilian political

elites grew increasingly hostile to the emperor, who was finally forced to abdicate in 1831 in favor of his five-year-old son.

The regency brought to power men like Bernardo de Vasconcelos and Evaristo da Veiga, who during the First Empire had earned reputations as authentic liberals mainly because of their attacks against the emperor and their efforts to replace traditional colonial institutions with others more compatible with the new nation. But in regard to democracy their position was not different from that of José Bonifácio, whom they had always perceived as an entrenched conservative. Like him, they despised the masses and wanted to deny them political participation.

Evaristo da Veiga's newspaper, *Aurora Fluminense*, is one of the best sources for the study of their thought, "No extremism of any sort. To implement the Constitution is the liberals' main task." That was the newspaper's slogan. A constitutional monarchy with limited participation was its ideal.¹⁴ Before the emperor's abdication, Evaristo da Veiga sided with the liberal opposition and devoted the pages of his newspaper to attacking both the republicans and the absolutists. Facing the rising tide of popular demands, Evaristo da Veiga became increasingly conservative after the emperor's abdication. Through his newspaper he accused the radical liberals of instigating "class struggle" and "racial hatred" and of seeking to discredit those who (like him) were committed to order and "wanted to avoid a violent confrontation between proprietors and the have-nots."¹⁵ Veiga, like many others who passed from the opposition to government, found himself on the defensive. A man of the center, he felt challenged by those who conspired to bring the emperor back, but even more by those who wanted to put liberal ideas at the service of the masses. "I fear today more the rabble's courtisans," he wrote, "than those who hang on the monarch's cape."¹⁶

The shift from the center toward a conservative position characteristic of Evaristo da Veiga is also typical of Bernardo Pereira de Vasconcelos, another famous liberal politician of this period.¹⁷ Like many other liberals he started by charging the emperor with favoring men of aristocratic origins and disregarding the constitution, which asserted the equality of all and prohibited any distinctions not based on merit.¹⁸ Consistently with his liberal views, he condemned interference in the economy and insisted that private initiative was always more intelligent than that of the government.¹⁹ In the Chamber of Deputies he opposed protectionist policies favoring local industries and spoke of the need to keep a "religious respect for freedom and property."²⁰ His struggle in favor of the abolition of colonial institutions, his criticism

of royal despotism and of aristocratic power and privileges, his opposition to state intervention in the economy, his religious respect for freedom and property defined the nature of the elites' liberalism during this period. But like other liberals during the regency he became increasingly conservative. On the eve of the emperor's abdication, Vasconcelos was a popular leader, a spokesman for the people, acclaimed by the masses. Ten years later, his house was stoned by the people. The hero of the masses had come to be seen as their enemy.

Replying to those who accused him of having betrayed his liberal principles, Vasconcelos told the Chamber of Deputies in 1838: "I was a liberal when freedom was everyone's aspiration but did not exist in practice. Then, power was all and I was a liberal. Today, however, the country's situation is different. Democratic principles have won everything and have compromised much. Society once threatened by power is now threatened by disorder and anarchy. I want to serve it now as I served it in the past. That is why I have moved backwards. I am not a deserter. I do not abandon the cause I defended when it was in danger . . . I leave it now when its triumph is so certain that it risks being excessive."²¹ Vasconcelos's words were greeted with vigorous applause. Among those who welcomed his speech were Antonio Carlos de Andrada e Silva and José Clemente Pereira, two of his former political adversaries. These men who in the past had struggled against each other had been brought together by their fear of the masses.

Apologizing for his change of political opinion, Antonio Carlos would say, "I asked everyone to examine his conscience. Didn't we all change our opinion?" A participant in the 1817 republican revolution, converted to a monarchist in 1822, an opponent of the emperor in 1823, accused in 1831 of conspiring to bring him back, Antonio Carlos had good reasons to speak about change of opinions. But he was not the only one to have changed his mind or to feel threatened by the radical liberals' demands.

Two newspapers of this period, *O Jurujuba dos Farroupilhas* and *Nova Luz Brasileira*, exemplify the radical liberals' position in the 1830s. To judge by the content of these and other radical newspapers, their constituency was the urban petite-bourgeoisie: small merchants, artisans, pharmacists, soldiers, schoolteachers, and the like, men who had been particularly hurt by economic and social change and often showed their discontent by rioting in the big cities. Their radicalism reminds us of the radicalism of the French sans culottes. Their flamboyant radical rhetoric frequently expressed a desire to rehabilitate old institutions and to resist change. But in this attempt they waged a mer-

ciless attack on the Brazilian elites and the institutions these elites had created.²²

Radical liberals criticized the commercial treaties benefiting foreign merchants, particularly the English, who had acquired the monopoly of trade to the detriment of the local merchants and artisans. Using a strong nationalist language, they went as far as to suggest the revocation of those treaties.²³ They attacked the "aristocrats" whom they saw as responsible for the unpopular economic policies and supporters of absolutist regimes. In one of its articles *Nova Luz Brasileira* proposed that the right to vote be denied to the aristocrats, "hypocritical and ambitious people that only find reason in the rich capitalists and the powerful men, however ill-intentioned and dishonest those might be."²⁴ It went even further, suggesting that the assets of several well-known personalities such as the Barão do Rio da Prata, Vilela Barbosa, Baependi, and all the councillors of state, be expropriated.²⁵ Following the same line, the *O Jurujuba dos Farroupilhas*, another radical newspaper published in Rio de Janeiro, criticized the despicable aristocrats who sold the country and its freedom to Europe.²⁶ Believing that the aristocrats' source of power was their ownership of large tracts of land, the editor of *Nova Luz* engaged in a campaign for agrarian reform, proposing the expropriation of all unused land. With this proposal he hoped to put an end to what he called Brazilian "feudalism." *Nova Luz* also condemned slavery and racial discrimination and asked for the immediate emancipation of slaves—with the condition, however, that they continued to be bound to the land for a period of thirty years. Like many other radical liberals of this period, the editor of *Nova Luz* also opposed political and administrative centralization and favored "a democratic federation according to the North American model." Yet, in spite of his admiration for the United States he did not seem to have any appreciation for its republican form of government and continued to consider constitutional monarchy the ideal form.

The radicals' democratic claims and their critique of the elites were sometimes couched in traditional Christian rhetoric. "The ragged, honest people are those that please the Lord," wrote *O Jurujuba* in one of its editorials. "When the Redeemer came to the world, He chose his disciples and apostles among them, despising the evil capitalists, of whom He said it was easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter heaven."

Viewing anarchy as "an ephemeral evil that ordinarily brings greater good," and history as "a struggle between the powerful and the powerless," radical liberals incited the people to rise against those who de-

ceived them and betrayed the nation. At the same time, they appealed to the soldiers to join the people in "their struggle for their rights" and to fight for "a government of the people and by the people."²⁷

These appeals to the soldiers were not mere rhetorical devices. In fact, at that time, many soldiers—mostly mercenaries returning from the Cisplatina on the southern frontier—were crowding into the city of Rio de Janeiro and joining the masses in their complaints against increasing food prices and an overflow of counterfeit money. Indeed, in July 1831 a crowd rioted in the capital demanding the dissolution of the Chamber of Deputies and the organization of a constitutional assembly to decide the future of the country.

While the soldiers answered the radicals' appeals, their officers sided with the government and organized a battalion of "volunteers" praised by the *Aurora Fluminense* as *Os Bravos da Pátria* ("the Fatherland's Warriors"). This battalion succeeded in putting down the uprising, bringing to an end what the elites' newspapers called the "ferocious *oklocracy*."

In other parts of the country, radical groups that rose up were also defeated by government troops. Revolutionary leaders were arrested, many soldiers were dismissed and the standing army was reduced. To strengthen its position the central government created instead a National Guard. Diogo Feijó, then minister of justice, ordered Rio de Janeiro's police chief to distribute arms to businessmen interested in keeping the order as well as to three thousand citizens qualified to be electors—in other words, men who had an annual income of 200\$000 or more. This was the beginning of the National Guard, which in the hands of the government later became an important political tool with which to threaten the opposition.²⁸

Commenting on the measures taken by the regency, *Matraca dos Farroupillhas*, another radical newspaper, wrote that "the one time popular and revolutionary priest Feijó had become the capitalist's hero."²⁹ Like Bernardo de Vasconcelos, Evaristo da Veiga, Andrada e Silva, and many others, the ultraliberal Feijó had found himself in a position increasingly conservative. After the repression he made an astonishing declaration. He said that the Brazilians were by nature an orderly people, respectful of the Constitution, and aspiring only to enjoy their rights and their freedom, a statement that although denied over and over again by the facts, became part of the set of beliefs that together with the myth of racial democracy and the benevolence of the Brazilian elites, constituted the core of their social mythology until the twentieth century.

In spite of Feijó's repressive measures and optimistic remarks,

the struggle between the radical liberals and the moderate liberals—becoming-conservatives was not over in 1831. Although severely repressed, the radicals were not completely defeated. Their demands for decentralization found echo in the Chamber of Deputies and two steps were taken in that direction; the Judicial Code of 1832 and the Additional Act of 1834. The code gave local justices of the peace criminal jurisdiction and provided that the prosecutor, the municipal judge, and the judge of orphans—all of whom had formerly been appointed by the central government—were now to be selected from a list supplied by the Municipal Council. The code also gave ample powers to the jury. The Additional Act to the constitution was approved in 1834, as a concession to radical pressures. Radicals had demanded municipal autonomy, suppression of the Council of State, renewal of one-third of the Senate every four years, creation of provincial assemblies, and separation of provincial revenues from the national revenue. The Additional Act to the constitution did abolish the Council of State, transformed the provincial councils into provincial legislatures and separated provincial from national revenues. But it kept senatorial privileges intact, including appointment for life and maintained municipal governments subordinated to the provincial government. The president of each province was to be appointed by the central government.

To a certain point the Judicial Code and the Additional Act to the Constitution represented a victory for the radicals. Yet, as soon as they were approved, they were criticized by those who feared that local autonomy would mean a blow to their power and who were anxious to withdraw the concessions they had made under pressure. The persistent climate of insurrection in different parts of the country only solidified their decision. The 1836 elections—when less than six thousand out of more than three million people voted—brought victory to the conservatives and marked the beginning of what was called the *Regresso*.

By that time the development of coffee plantations in the surroundings of Rio de Janeiro had strengthened the conservatives' parliamentary basis. Coffee planters had established an alliance with sugar plantation owners from the Brazilian northeast, and, together with the export and import groups, they had succeeded in acquiring control over the central government. Meanwhile the growth of imports had undermined even further the position of the small merchants and local craftsmen who had supplied the grass roots for the radical movements in Rio and other port cities.

In 1840 hoping that the coronation of the second emperor would bring peace to the nation, Parliament decided to grant to the fourteen-

year-old prince the right to rule. Simultaneously it approved several conservative laws reinforcing the power of the central government. According to the new legislation the municipal judge and the judge of orphans as well as the prosecutors were once more to be appointed by the government. The justices of the peace continued to be elected but lost several of their powers to the police and to appointed judges. Juries' jurisdiction was reduced, while more power was given to the judges appointed by the government. The same conservative mood inspired changes in the organization of the National Guard. Here, too, elected officers were replaced by officers appointed by the government. The National Guard, rather than serving primarily the interests of local elites, became an instrument of the central government. Finally, the Council of State and the moderating power, suspended during the minority of the emperor, were reestablished. All these measures represented a step back in relation to the Judicial Code and the Additional Act, giving the central government and the national elites more power than they had ever had.³⁰

Contrary to the elites' expectations, however, the ascension of Pedro II to the throne in 1840 did not pacify the country. For more than ten years the nation continued to be shaken by uprisings in different regions. A revolutionary wave swept the North and the Northeast between 1837 and 1848 (Sabinada, Balaia, Cabanagem), and between 1835 and 1845 the southernmost province, the Rio Grande do Sul, was torn by civil war (Farrapos). In 1842 there were insurrections in Minas Gerais and São Paulo, and in 1848 it was the turn of Pernambuco (Praieira). All these revolutionary movements were indicative of the resistance the national elites had to overcome to establish their hegemony.³¹

From 1831 to 1848 radical liberal rhetoric was used by the revolutionary leaders to justify their rebellion. In Pernambuco the revolutionaries' political vocabulary showed some socialist overtones, echoing Fourier, Lacordaire, and Louis Blanc. But the predominant tone was liberal. Federalism, universal suffrage, freedom of speech, the guarantee of individual rights, abolition of the moderating power, separation of powers, abolition of the draft, nationalization of commerce, and agrarian reform were the themes that appeared over and over again in the radical press. The liberal discourse expressed many different and sometimes even conflicting aspirations. Most of those who joined the revolutions, however, did not do so for ideological reasons. They were moved by immediate and concrete concerns. Local elites protested against the loss of their power and the inroads the central government made into their communities, replacing traditionally elected

authorities with others appointed by the government, collecting taxes, intervening in the elections, and controlling private initiative. Native artisans and merchants protested against the increasing monopolization of trade by foreigners favored by commercial treaties. Peasants and urban masses reacted against military conscription and protested against the increase in food prices. Soldiers rioted because their salaries were not paid. Class and racial conflicts, tensions between the poor and the rich, between foreigners and natives or between blacks and whites, reluctance on the part of traditional elites to submit themselves to the central government, competition for power at the regional level between different segments of the elites, all these reasons mixed together were behind the uprisings that kept the imperial government on permanent alert for a period of almost twenty years after the abdication of Pedro I. Often the lines of conflict were difficult to trace because they were blurred by confusing networks of patronage.

During those years two political parties emerged from the struggles: the Liberals and the Conservatives. In theory, at least, these parties had two different programs, and indeed during the early years of the regency, Liberals and Conservatives spoke different languages and seemed to be battling for different causes. Liberals were federalists, favored local autonomy, demanded the abolition of the moderating power and the Council of State, opposed the appointment of senators for life and government interference in the economy, supported free trade, religious freedom, and freedom of expression. They advocated the principle "the king reigns but does not rule."³² The Conservatives defended centralization, the moderating power, the Council of State, tenure in the Senate, Catholicism as the official religion, and the principle that the king reigns *and* rules.³²

But the appearance of political differences did not go very deep. During the regency, fear of the radical liberals had brought Liberals and Conservatives together, making their differences less and less relevant. Once the revolutionary movements had been repressed and the state apparatus reinforced, Liberals and Conservatives even participated in the same cabinets. This cooperation between the two parties, known as the *conciliação*, started in 1852 and lasted about ten years. By then Liberal and Conservative had become mere labels, and it became proverbial that there was nothing more similar to a Liberal than a Conservative. Once in power Liberals forgot the demands they had made while in the opposition, Conservatives in power implemented reforms Liberals had pressured for. Nor could party labels and platforms contain individual politicians. Within the Liberal party there were entrenched conservatives, and among the members of the Conservative

party there were some politicians whose views were more liberal than those of the self-advertised Liberals. Ferreira Vianna, for example, was an important figure in the Conservative party. He occupied a position in the Chamber of Deputies in several legislatures between 1869 and 1889 and liked to present himself as a conservative man—"a man," he once said jokingly, "who liked to have the pitcher always in the same place so that he could find it in the middle of the night." But in spite of all his publicized conservatism, Ferreira Vianna was a great critic of the emperor's powers, opposed state intervention in the economy, and favored local and provincial autonomy.³³ All these issues belonged in the platform of the Liberal party. On the other hand, Zacarias de Góes, one of the leading figures in the Liberal party and the author of a famous book *Da Natureza e dos Limites do Poder Moderador* (On the Nature and Limits of the Moderating Power), in which he developed the thesis "the king reigns but does not rule," was one of the most eloquent supporters of the Church in a conflict between the bishops and the government in 1874. Together with his conservative political adversary Ferreira Vianna, the liberal Zacarias de Góes acted as the bishops' lawyer during their trial, defending them from the charges made by the Conservative cabinet headed by the Barão do Rio Branco, the bishops' main opponent.³⁴

To find Liberals supporting conservative causes or Conservatives defending liberal proposals was not uncommon, particularly when the issues were of major significance and highly controversial, like the religious question or the abolition of slavery. When a bill proposing the emancipation of the children born to slave mothers was discussed, there were Liberals and Conservatives on both sides. The same happened later, when another bill, proposing the emancipation of sixty-year-old slaves, was voted.³⁵ And when the Parliament debated the measures to be taken against the bishops who had disobeyed the constitution, which prohibited them from implementing papal bulls without the government's approval, some Liberals, like Nabuco, supported the Conservative cabinet, others like Zacarias de Góes sided with the bishops. There were also Conservatives on both sides. On none of these occasions was party discipline enforced.

Internal divisions within each party and the lack of coherent ideological commitment help to explain the great instability of the cabinets. During the 49 years of Pedro II's rule there were thirty-nine cabinets. Dissidents often supported the opposition party, throwing their own party out of power. As long as the elites agreed about the main policies to be followed the alternation of political parties did not make any fundamental difference.

In the last decades of the empire, however, with increasing economic and social differentiation and growing divergences between different segments of the elites, political party rotation became a more meaningful matter. Even then it was still possible for a Liberal like Martinho de Campos, the head of a cabinet that lasted only six months in 1882, to say in his inaugural speech: "Today we can say, with the late Visconde de Albuquerque, 'They are very similar, a Liberal and a Conservative, and I would add, even a Republican. They all seem to belong to the same family. We live very well together on the same boat and we do not have any conflicts of opinion.'"³⁶

A few months later, Ferreira Vianna, commenting on the similarity between the two parties, remarked in his ironic style, bringing laughter in Parliament: "The opposition of today says what the opposition of yesterday used to say. The opposition of yesterday today in power, glorifies the same deeds it condemned yesterday!"³⁷

Machado de Assis, the great novelist of the nineteenth century, described well this reality when he made the wife of one of his characters, whose party had been defeated, tell her husband to change sides and support his political adversaries: "You were with them as in a ball, where it is not necessary to have the same ideas to dance the same minuet."³⁸ It is no wonder that "farce," "comedy," "theater," and "dance" were words frequently used by politicians to describe their politics. "I am tired of acting in this political comedy," said Ferreira Vianna.³⁹ His words sounded remarkably similar to those of Sales Torres Homem, who in a letter to the Visconde de Ourem confessed: "I have lost my health and all my illusions. However, here am I, for the second time, in the cabinet, playing a role in this theater of chimeras."⁴⁰

The similarity between the two parties, the family resemblance of which Martinho de Campos spoke, was a product of the similarity of their social basis. In the past, some historians identified the Liberal party with urban groups and the Conservative party with plantation owners. Others made the opposite correlations, perceiving links between the business community, the bureaucrats, and the Conservative party, with the Liberal party representing agrarian interests. Both were guesses, based on impressionistic evaluations (and probably not totally wrong since to be a Conservative or a Liberal did not necessarily mean anything very different). More recently, however, Murilo de Carvalho has arrived at the more careful conclusion that agrarian interests were equally represented in both parties. Merchants and bureaucrats were more numerous among the Conservatives and professionals among the Liberals.⁴¹ Yet this last difference fades in the light of the fact that the Conservative party stayed in power longer (2.6 years as against 1.3) and

had more opportunity to exert patronage. Since both Liberals and Conservatives spoke for the same social groups, it is not surprising that party affiliation was usually more a question of family and kinship than of ideology. And until the last two decades of the empire, political struggle was really little else than a struggle for power between factions under the leadership of prestigious families. This, of course, did not make political competition less intense, or electoral dispute less passionate. Quite the contrary. In fact, both parties resorted to all sorts of political maneuvers to remain in power and electoral fraud was rampant. The cabinets replaced provincial presidents and functionaries loyal to the opposition, created parishes where they had friends, and abolished them where they had enemies. They harassed rank-and-file opposition voters, threatening them with conscription, rewarded those who supported the cabinet with jobs, promotions, and sinecures; mobilized the National Guard to intimidate the opposition by forcing its voters to stay home on election day. When this failed, they resorted to violence. Opposition voters were often expelled from the churches where they were supposed to vote. Ballot boxes were stolen and reapplied filled with more votes than there were voters or with the ballots replaced by others.⁴² But all this struggle for power had more to do with the competition between factions than with fundamental ideological conflicts.

In the last decade of the empire the political competition acquired new meaning. Economic and social change since the 1850s brought to the political arena new groups of interests making it impossible to keep the alliance between the two parties. The Conciliação was broken. While in the first half of the century liberals had become increasingly conservative, in the second half the movement went in the opposite direction. An increasing number of politicians left the Conservative party to join the Liberal party in the sixties. This was the case of Pedro de Araujo Lima, the Marquês de Olinda, Nabuco de Araujo, Zacarias de Góes e Vasconcelos, the Marquês de Paranaguá, Sinimbu, and Saraiva. Justifying his political conversion Nabuco de Araujo, who had been a great supporter of the Conciliação in the past, said he had become convinced that instead of fighting against the overwhelming stream of democracy the statesman should try to guide it, so that it would not be fatal to the nation. It was in this Tocquevillian spirit that Nabuco and other Conservative politicians who had joined the Liberal party, founded the Progressive League in 1864, committing themselves to a program of reform.⁴³ Then once again the voice of Liberals would be heard and their rhetoric regain prestige. Liberals dug out old

themes that had been buried since the revolution of 1848 in Pernambuco and started talking about the people again. In their rhetoric the people appeared associated with other favorite words such as progress, reason, and science. The beginning of the Paraguayan War in 1864 forced the liberals to postpone their project. But in 1868, the replacement of a Liberal by a Conservative cabinet triggered a political crisis of large proportions culminating in a Liberal party manifesto calling for decentralization, the transformation of the Council of State into an exclusively administrative organ, abolition of tenure in the Senate, direct elections, extension of the right to vote to non-Catholics, autonomy of the judiciary, creation of a system of education independent of the state, secularization of cemeteries, religious freedom, and gradual emancipation of slaves. In spite of its reformist tone the manifesto did not satisfy the most radical groups in the Liberal party and they issued their own asking for the abolition of the moderating power, the National Guard, the Council of State and slavery. They also demanded direct elections, universal suffrage and elections for provincial governors and police chiefs. A few months later a group of politicians, some of whom were Liberal party dissidents, founded the Republican party. Their manifesto did not add much to the two already issued by the Liberals. It denounced that in Brazil "freedom of conscience was nullified by a privileged church; economic freedom suppressed by a restrictive legislation; freedom of press subordinated to the discretion of government functionaries; freedom of association dependent on government's approval; freedom of education curtailed by arbitrary government inspection, and by official monopoly; individual freedom, subjected to arrest, to the draft, to the National Guard, was deprived even of the guarantees of the habeas corpus."⁴⁴ After repeating more or less the same demands Liberals had made, the Republican manifesto suggested that a National Convention be given powers to change the regime.

An analysis of these three documents reveals that except for the obvious difference between republicans and monarchists, they all had the same goals: to undermine the structures of power that supported traditional oligarchies, to curtail government interference in the private sector, and to increase provincial autonomy. Only the radical faction within the Liberal party demanded immediate abolition of slavery.

The program of reform responded to growing feelings of dissatisfaction among several groups in the society. It appealed to the growing middle classes, particularly to the professionals and bureaucrats tired of the uncertainties of political patronage and to the thriving commu-

they did not trust (in spite of all their talk about the people), and unwilling to give up their patronage schemes, Brazilian Liberals had proved incapable of accomplishing the program of political reforms they had proposed. Ironically, it was only after the Republicans allied with the military to overthrow the monarchical regime that those reforms were implemented.

The failure of Brazilian Liberals to live up to the ideals of liberalism went much deeper than politics, however. It touched the heart of Brazilian social and cultural reality. Ideologically, the Liberals were committed to a program that if implemented would reduce the role of patronage in their world. But they functioned in that world as the creators and the manipulators of patronage. And the unavoidable fact was that Brazilian society was saturated with both the practice and the ethic of patronage. All through the history of the empire, the Liberals, like the rest of the elite, had been basically conservative and anti-democratic. Their goal had always been to conciliate order and progress, the status quo with modernization. With the exception of the abolition of slavery, most of the reforms proposed by Liberals had been exclusively political and did not touch the economic and social structures. Nor did they increase popular political participation. Even the electoral reform of 1881 (which was greeted as a democratic conquest) did not lead to the expansion of the electorate. In fact, the total number of people voting diminished. The only effect the electoral reform had was to give more weight to the urban vote, since according to the 1881 law voters had to be literate—a requirement easier to satisfy in the cities. Nothing the Liberals had achieved touched the profound conflict between their supposed liberal values and the patronage system in which they lived and pursued their careers.

Because of the survival of traditional structures of production and of the system of clientele and patronage, liberal rhetoric in Brazil continued to be in conflict with the social and political practice. The typical bourgeois values usually associated with liberalism—commitment to work, thrift, reason, attachment to representative forms of government, respect for the law and the court system, individualism and self-reliance, belief in the universality of human rights—could hardly find confirmation in a slave society—a society that despised labor, cultivated leisure and ostentation, favored kinship, stressed individual dependency, openly promoted individuals on the basis of their personal relations rather than on their merit, institutionalized the arbitrary, made the exception the rule, and negated for most of the population basic human rights. Brazilian elites could not but be aware that in Brazil liberal theory did not have anything to do with the reality of the

of businessmen and industrialists oppressed by government regulations. It appealed to the military who during the Paraguayan War (1864—70) had become more cohesive and more conscious of the deficiencies of the army and more resentful of civilian "interference." It also appealed to a new generation of politicians for whom a program of reform could win an election. Intellectuals found in the reformist campaign new sources of inspiration and new constituencies. The reformist liberal program was also attractive to some regional elites, particularly in São Paulo, Pará, Pernambuco, and Rio Grande do Sul. Uneven economic growth and increasing competition for government subsidies, conflict of interests in relation to immigration policies, slavery, tariffs, and loans had made some sectors of the elite particularly aware of the disadvantages of centralization.

So universally recognized was the need for reform that even the Conservatives felt obliged to support them, particularly after the emperor himself came out publicly in their favor.⁴⁵ The Conservative cabinet of the Barão do Rio Branco (1871—75) took as its responsibility to promote some of those reforms. Considering their past history there is nothing surprising about Conservatives implementing Liberal reforms even though, as one might expect, they trimmed the proposals to make them more acceptable to their constituencies. More surprising is that when the Liberals took power in 1878 after ten years of political ostracism they did not accomplish many of the reforms they had battled for while in the opposition (reforms that the Conservatives themselves had not dared to carry on). When in 1889 the head of the last cabinet of the empire, the Liberal Visconde de Ouro Preto, presented his program to the Parliament,⁴⁶ many of the reforms he proposed were shockingly familiar; the limitation of the senators' terms, reduction of the Council of State to a mere administrative body, elections of municipal authorities, election of provincial presidents and vice-presidents from a list of those who had won the most votes in elections, universal suffrage, freedom of worship, reform of the system of education to further private initiative—all these suggestions, which had been in the platform of the Liberal party for at least twenty years, had never been put into practice because Liberal party politicians had been as reluctant as Conservatives to promote changes that in the long run would undermine their own sources of power and diminish their political authority. Only a minority in the Parliament did support the reforms. For many "Liberals" reform had been nothing but rhetoric.

The political elite's unwillingness to promote those reforms led in the end to the 1889 military coup that overthrew the monarchy. Presured between the traditional elites, they wanted to displace the masses

lives of millions of people around them. But they could attribute this to Brazilian backwardness and could continue to imagine that in "civilized" nations liberal practice corresponded more closely to liberal theory. Thus while in Europe liberals who came to grips with the experience of the commune and were threatened by the masses were losing faith in bourgeois values which had inspired their liberalism, in Brazil, liberalism continued until the end of the empire to be a utopia, a promise to be fulfilled. Brazilians might question its practice, but not its premises. For them it was the practice that was wrong, not the theory.

It was the hope that the promise could be fulfilled that in the seventies was behind the criticism of the institutions, a criticism that expressed a naive belief in the redeeming qualities of progress, science, and reform. Disillusioned with the practice of liberalism in Brazil, many of the reformists of the seventies and eighties found in positivism their source of inspiration.⁴⁷ In Comte they found support for their program aiming at reducing the state to a mere custodian of the social order and their desire to achieve progress and modernization without changing fundamentally the social structures. Comte's respect for civil liberties and his commitment to religious freedom, free association, freedom of opinion, and free enterprise could not but appeal to those who had endorsed the Liberal program in 1868 or the Republican manifesto of 1870. His notions about the family as the basic social unit were also pleasing to men who lived in a patriarchal society. Comte was even more appealing to them because of his critique of traditional elites and his deep respect for social hierarchy and social inequalities.

While liberalism continued to be a utopia for the elites, for the large majority of the Brazilian population trapped in the system of clientele and patronage, liberalism was nothing but empty rhetoric. As a consequence, for them liberalism did not have the masking effect that it did in other parts of the world. This ideological role was played by the ethic of patronage.

Establishing vertical relations between individuals from the dominant classes and those from below and defining their relations in terms of reciprocal favors, patronage helped to disguise (though not eliminate) class and racial tensions. Through patronage, talented individuals belonging to the lower classes were co-opted by the elites. Behind every self-made man there was always a patron to remind him that he would not have succeeded on his own. Within this system of clientele and patronage politicians and the state were not seen as representatives of the people but as their patrons, and individuals' rights ap-

peared as personal concessions. The system of patronage based on personal loyalties and exchange of favors implied the subservience of the electorate to the local boss, the complacency of the court system, the systematic disregard for the law, the legitimation of privilege.

The coexistence of the ethic of patronage with the liberal ethic reproduced at the ideological level the experience of people living in a society in which capitalism grew within a network of patronage. It also translated the contradictions of the bourgeois-gentilhomme, characteristic of the Brazilian elite—a man who lived in Brazil with his mind on Europe, "who had one eye on profit, the other on gentility"; who used slaves to produce for the international market; and who depended on traditional institutions to further capital accumulation.

The contradictions between the ethic of liberalism and the ethic of patronage made it possible for Brazilians to evaluate liberalism from the perspective of patronage and to evaluate patronage from the perspective of liberalism. The ethic of patronage uncovered the emptiness of liberal rhetoric. Liberal rhetoric exposed the violence and oppression of patronage. Nothing could define better the specificity of Brazilian liberalism than the words of Machado de Assis: "In Brazil political science finds a limit in the henchmen's head."⁴⁸