

*A esquerda e o golpe de 64. Vinte e cinco anos depois, as forças populares repensam seus mitos, sonhos, e ilusões.* By DÉNIS DE MORAES. Rio de Janeiro: Espaço e Tempo, 1989. Notes. 379 pp. Paper.

This unusual book, part screenplay and part documentary, seeks to explain the failure of the Brazilian Left in 1964. It is divided into four parts. The first two spin by like a newsreel, complete with camera prompts and elaborate scenarios. One minute a “close-up” of contemporary newspaper headlines fills the page; the next, the text jumps ahead 25 years to a relevant quote from an oral history. Part 3 offers, with little commentary, original interviews with 19 prominent radical-to-moderate nationalists who participated in the events of 1964. In the final section the author, a Brazilian journalist who co-wrote *Prestes: lutas e autocríticas* (1982) with Francisco Viana, draws conclusions.

Dênis de Moraes attributes the Left’s downfall to four factors. The radical nationalists both overestimated their strength and underestimated that of their right-wing opposition. Behind their triumphant self-assurance (*triumfalismo*), they remained seriously divided over goals and wracked by rivalry (p. 361). Although the Right accused President João Goulart of leading the Left, Goulart actually proved incapable of effective leadership, and he deserves most of the blame for the Left’s defeat. Finally, the Left undervalued democracy, seeing it as a means of achieving power but a practice of dubious value in its own right, and not worth fighting over.

Many of these conclusions are based on reflective interviews with such prominent informants as Gregório Bezerra, former militant of the Partido Comunista Brasileiro (PCB); Celso Furtado, minister of economic planning under Goulart; Leonel Brizola, the outspoken former governor of Rio Grande do Sul; and Herbert José de Souza, a leader of Ação Popular, a radical Catholic youth group active in 1964. These interviews as well as numerous long quotes from other informants, newspapers, and radio transcripts make the book rich in source material.

Moraes is particularly skilled at examining the divisions that split and weakened the Left. Many organizations, from the Trotskyists to the Peasant Leagues, shaped their identities in reaction against the PCB, Brazil’s oldest and best-organized leftist force. From within and without, members of these groups bitterly debated everything from philosophical questions to tactical ones.

It seems questionable, though, to rely principally on the opinions of leaders who proved their incapacity to lead in 1964. The book remains so devoted to the perspective from “inside” the Left that one wonders just how important any of these figureheads were to the people of Brazil. This question seems fundamental to analyzing those who claimed to speak for “the masses.” Nevertheless, whoever takes on that far more ambitious project will surely find Moraes’ book as handy as a script is to a filmmaker.

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