

# A Long-Lasting Crisis

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**E**VEN IF IT HAS ALL ended in a truce, a cold analysis of the crisis that shook the Brazilian Senate to the medulla and spilled over onto the Presidential Palace suggests that the storm has only lulled. Far from being resolved, the crisis merely slumbers. Its terms and protagonists, as well as the various institutional factors that propelled it, remain untouchable, and there is little to suggest that the near future will usher in a virtuous phase qualitatively any different to that which lay at the root of the crisis.

It is a paradoxical situation.

In the short-term at least there is no chance of a solution arising that is powerful enough to expel the toxins that have contaminated the Brazilian political system, some of which have been, over the course of history, seeped into the very bedrock of our social experience and political practices. There is no power out there strong enough to stock the House with a decent parliamentary corps – the potential existence of which is yet to be proven – capable of growing in leadership and of orchestrating, in the near future, the ethical, political and institutional re-edification we so badly need.

For its part, the tarnished image of the Senate – and, by extension, of the Legislature, the Executive, the parliamentarians and their parties – has proved so deep, cut so close to the bone, that it has reached saturation point and a crux of inflection. Even if not yet wholly evident, one cannot deny that a new agenda must surely emerge from the mounting rubble.

As we all know, very often societies need to teeter on the edge of the abyss before they rally forces, heal their wounds and set once again about the business of building a future. Recent Brazilian history is replete with illustrations. For example, the dictatorial regime of 1964 had to sink to the extremes of savagery and tyranny witnessed in 1975 before the few roused the many in a push for change and re-democratization. Inflation had to spiral to 230% per annum in 1985 before a technical and political drive got underway, with the Cruzado Plan, to secure monetary stabilization, a goal obtained some years later. The slime of corruption, racketeering and cronyism had to spill out from under the doors of the Presidential palace before society campaigned for the impeachment of the president of the Republic in 1992, begetting a new political cycle for the nation.

Recognizing this does not mean accepting the existence of a rigorous, objective and unrelenting law, but rather simply entails acknowledging a certain tendency or probability running through the logic of facts. There were other touch-and-go moments in recent history in which, as we know, the upswing did not come. The *Mensalão* crisis of

2005 (which uncovered a government scheme for buying Congressional support through a monthly stipend) springs readily to mind. Though it shook the structures of the Presidency and political system as a whole, it neither stopped Lula being re-elected in 2006 nor eliminated the bad habits that impregnate and disrupt relations between the Executive and the Legislature. Even so, the perpetrators did not come away wholly unscathed: a certain spell was broken, and at least one party had to embark on the arduous and painful process of trying to reconcile itself with its own history.

In the future, 2009 may well be seen as prodigious in regurgitating trends that have prevailed in recent Brazilian politics. Lula cranked up the style that has won him such high approval ratings, hitting an impressive 84% at the start of that year. His dedicated insistence on dialoguing directly with the masses, regardless of party lines, his concern with building bridges between the federal and local governments in order to boost the viability of strategic public policies and lay the groundwork for the up-coming presidential succession, his seductive and paternal language, coupled with his political sagacity, have become hallmarks of his two mandates. Despite its somewhat “populist” flavor, Lula’s administration succeeded in producing institutional life and a governmental routine, elements that are vital in a nation so lacking in orchestration and tools of coordination. In good measure, Lula’s way of doing politics has Brazil written all over it, reflecting and reproducing a standard of political conduct that is deeply engrained in Brazilian historico-social experience. As the political scientist Luiz Werneck Vianna likes to say, it is a kind of updated version of the “cordiality” that was, and remains, so important in the formation of the Brazilian nation state.

Throughout 2009, the opposition (The Brazilian Social Democratic Party – PSDB, and The Democratic Party - DEM) strove to ferret out and denounce the slightest whiff of pre-campaign electioneering. Though they took this as their core approach, they went about it in such a blundering and incompetent way that it served only to exacerbate what was already a miserable slump in form. To demand that a government refrain from political maneuvering or from seeking to draw electoral benefit from its actions makes as little sense as to suggest that true opposition means working at all times to demolish the status-quo. Their denunciations merely demonstrated their fear and worry at Lula’s machinations, perhaps being a knee-jerk reaction typical of opposition parties scurrying to put their own house in order.

Both the Lula style of politics and the opposition’s fragility in dealing with it illustrate the difficulty Brazilian society has faced in kick-starting a virtuous cycle of democratic life, reform and social reorganization. The Senate’s ongoing attempts to completely sully its public image and denigrate its functions reflect a process driven by the compulsion of politicians and parties to prioritize short-term interests. The popularization of the Presidency has gained momentum under the charismatic figure of Lula. The fact that leaders of another ilk have not yet emerged denotes the want of a sufficiently lucid and united

democratic opposition that is courageous enough to spurn short-term gains for the benefit of society.

It would be no exaggeration to say that, in Brazil today, the political climate is one racked with dilemmas, paradoxes and question-marks, in which there is no Machiavellian-style Prince (Statesman) and from which all of Antonio Gramsci's modern-day princes (political parties) have fled, leaving nobody to organize ideas and interests around a project for society. The Senate crisis is but one more manifestation of this fact; a no doubt relevant detail, but a mere detail nonetheless.

### **The Realism in Question**

A striking feature of the present crisis is the passivity with which Brazilian politicians are facing it. Sometimes indifferent to its ramifications, sometimes deaf to the expectations of public opinion, the politicians have been found wanting, as if contaminated by some form of parliamentarian compunction to close ranks. Through the occasional chink jar (largely irresponsible) spasms of indignation and vehemence.

How are we to understand that the supposed jewel in the crown of Brazilian politics could be allowed to languish like this, bleeding from its open wounds and left to fester? Has the Senate lost all aura and relevance, such that its inner turbulence causes no disturbance to the political and governmental routine? And what of the self-esteem of the senators, who do not seem at all bothered by the institution's loss of prestige, and, consequently, by the belittlement of their own mandates?

The Senate crisis is visible, but there is more to it than that. We need to qualify its scope with a certain rigor, if only not to overburden the word "crisis". The situation is not terminal and we do not find ourselves in the anteroom to political bankruptcy. Nor are we in the presence of an "organic crisis" capable of affecting the State as a whole, or, for that matter, of a "hegemonic crisis" that could strip us of all orientation or moral compass.

However, we are justified in speaking of a crisis because our institutions are not living up to society's expectations and are becoming mere caricatures of themselves. It is not purely a matter of senator Sarney, or of this or that party, or even of the Legislature as a whole. The Judiciary, too, has long been in need of reform. Not even the Presidency works as it should, if we measure the president's popularity against the achievements of his government.

Should we prefer to avoid the heavy connotations of the word 'crisis', we might say that the nation is currently suffering from a serious political and institutional malaise.

This has not been brought upon us solely because the president of the Senate has sunk into a mire that has seen him squander the political capital accrued over decades of activity. It is not even a problem of corruption, the misappropriation of public funds or of nepotism, though these are certainly

contributing factors. The dwindling moral authority of the president of the Senate now spreads throughout the House, and tarnishes the other Powers too, from the Legislature to the Executive.

The crisis, which at first sight seems to be localized and contained, and is treated as such, has in fact spread throughout the whole political corps, impregnating and blemishing the institutional structure and the body politic.

Were this not the case, the system would have reacted. It would certainly not be standing passively by, watching its own emaciation. The scenario is grim: if the political system fails to react, will that not have been because the country does not need it to; does not recognize itself within it? In other words, the institutions don't even have to work properly for things to continue as they are, in this irritating and normalized languor. We will not slump into the abyss without them, but we won't make any progress either. Could it be that the institutions have become something irksomely 'functional', impotent to help or hinder the political system as it continues to tick over?

The Senate plays an important role in the Brazilian institutional engineering. Its brief is to dampen or undo the occasional "distempers" of the Congress, balance out the representation and aggrandize the Republic. It has done neither, and if it fails to function, or functions badly, it cripples the institutions, aggravating their many deficiencies. When the institutions falter, mediocrity and emptiness prevail. The only reason the situation does not deteriorate further is because it is precisely at these moments that the good must stand up and deliver.

Hence a serious question hovers above the Executive and the President's own ruling party, Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT), the Workers' Party. Why did they decide to shield the president of the Senate and throw water on the crisis? The easy answer, loyal to the "political realism" with which many have tried to explain the actions of the Presidency, is that it was to protect the coalition with the PMDB (Partido do Movimento Democrático Brasileiro) and prevent the Senate from falling into the hands of the opposition. But this response simply prolongs the agony of the Senate and destabilizes national political life. It neither assuages nor improves the situation; it does not resolve any of the country's political problems. It does not even help the government, or boost the prospects of its candidates for the 2010 elections.

Realism is valuable in politics. In this field, not everything that glistens is gold and the best deeds are not always done by the best people, nor the worst by the worst. Max Weber said as much in his famous essay on politics as a vocation. And we all know that, in political environments, the evidence does not always correspond to the facts. It is obvious that the opposition had a hand in the avalanche of denunciations against Sarney. It is also clear that the opposition would benefit from his downfall, especially given the blood-pact the President sealed with the senator and his party. But a little opposition is exactly what a democratic government needs, if only not to sit on its laurels or get the notion

that it controls society as a whole. The opposition parties wanted to use the Senate crisis to gain leverage for 2010 and boost their performance. And what is wrong with that? What we cannot accept is that the government should believe it can emerge unscathed from its bulletproofing of the Senate.

No realism should be allowed to clash head-on with the traditions from which parties and politicians acquire their meaning, at the risk of destroying them. Our time is not particularly propitious to doctrinarian identities, loyalties or fidelities. However, the parties and politicians who want to be coherent have to fight against this, even if only to preserve the ties that bind them to their own histories and therefore lend more ethical vigor to politics.

Furthermore, no realism justifies going against the expectations of democratic public opinion, good sense and the voice of the man in the street. Of course, a government should never slaver to any of these, but it ignores them at the risk of extrapolating the bounds of realism. It is a matter of syntony.

### **Parliament under Siege**

One could add a second paradox to that outlined above, one that is every bit as intriguing and worrying. Contemporary democracy cannot function without a Legislature that is strong and active, but the power of the Executive and decisionism grows with the mounting pressures for participation, direct democracy, free social movement. The Parliaments seem to have lost their axis, being caught between governmental decisionism and social spontaneity (Nogueira, 2005).

There is a fundamental reason for this. Modern parliaments are institutions of the nation state, inherent to the constitution of national political systems in societies of “average” complexity. And the present globalized, transnational, hypercapitalist, superconnected world is configuring itself both as a system that surpasses the nation state (albeit without eliminating it), and as a global society that comes unaccompanied by a global State and which combines perfectly with the emergence of “high” complexity societies. The political systems (parliaments, parties, the political class, governments) are thrown into crisis because they reflect the constitution of this “global information society”, the effects of globalization and the reduced sovereignty of the nation States. They become more turbulent and less capable of interacting virtuously with the cultures and social structures that derive from the new terms of globalized life, that is, from plural, fragmented, reflexive, swift and explosive societies. Under conditions of “high” complexity, all the hubs of power tend to lose their sense of direction and proper functioning (Nogueira, 2004).

It is the same the world over, but is perhaps exacerbated in Latin-American nations, which tend to radicalize their modernity without assuaging the pains of their peripheral condition. Such nations are hypermodern but peripheral, and they share all the problems of this dual existential condition. By hypermodernizing, they become technology-driven, fuelled by information, the

market and competition; they become fast-moving, plural and fragmented. Yet by failing to shirk their peripheral status, they remain dependent, internally riven and characterized by a malformed citizenship and democracy that can neither round itself off nor enjoy a political culture spread evenly across the different channels of social life.

As a result, the image public opinion maintains of the Parliament and parliamentarians is prevalently negative. As a reaction to the “hyper-functionality” of the political system, the citizen of today tends to substitute political engagement (party loyalty, the legitimation of governments and electoral passion) with ethical indignation. As such, politics (instituted and systemic) changes form and ceases to constitute a priority investment on the part of the people.

In coming to the fore as a reaction to “excessive” social demands and the alleged sluggishness of the political system as a whole, Executive decisionism aggravates the situation, exacerbating the ill effects of the “irrationalities” existent within the system of representation (especially in its electoral dimension), the fragility and unpreparedness of the political class and the spectacle syndrome that drains politics of all civic sense.

Today, at the same time as the Legislature sees its strategic role in the politico-social game reiterated, it also sees itself submitted to a complex set of pressures and challenges stemming from the very process of the reorganization of contemporary life and, above all, its ramifications on the different concrete societies. The Legislature has, itself, become an “environment” burdened with demands and wrangling with complicated problems of organization, functioning and performance. Today, in general terms, it is an institution under siege.

The Legislature needs reinsertion within the contemporary democratic and social reality. Even though it continues to fulfill its fundamental functions, it has not yet succeeded in fully adapting to the deep-set social changes and transformations in democracy that have emerged since globalization and through the configuration of the “information society”. If modernity has ceased to be “solid” and become “liquid” (Bauman, 2001); if the “fluxes of power” have become less important than the “power of fluxes” (Castells, 1999); if society has become complex and reflexive (Giddens, 1991), then there should be no surprise that crises of legitimacy and functioning have beset our political institutions.

The Legislature is harried by demands from society, civil society, the market and the State. It finds it difficult to adapt and respond to the mounting pressures, demands and claims, and this has affected its performance. When faced with controversial or strategic themes, the Legislature appears to hyperventilate. It does not cease to function, nor fulfill its role, but it does so at the cost of great “suffering”.

The loss of face and the general malaise that surround the Legislature stem from both deep social changes, which have increased social differentiation and caused interests to spiral, and the transformations underway within contemporary democracy itself. From a classic representative democracy based on

parties and bonds of loyalty, we are moving toward a new form of representative democracy in which the “public” is a major player (Manin, 1996): the centrality of the individual is being substituted by the centrality of the “masses”. The representatives (parliamentarians) of today find themselves surrounded by participative mechanisms and corporate and media pressures. The electorate, for its part, is better informed, more stable and quicker to change opinion – in short, less *loyal* to politicians. As a result, the Legislature tends to drift away from society, with which it often fails to act in syntony.

So what can be done to bridge the (negative) gap between Parliament and parliamentarians and the positive functioning of the legislative institutions? How could we define the positive political functioning of Parliament?

Democracy cannot afford to ignore the conditions under which the Legislature has to work, whether in typical procedural and systemic terms (its relationship with the Executive, internal organization, regimetal procedures, etc.) or with regard to qualified human resources. The very figure of the parliamentarian, his/her advisors and the functionaries of the House not only need to be rethought, but “reeducated”.

Two main measures come to mind as a pair of kingposts or pillars for any institutional reform one might consider.

The Legislature needs to expand and accelerate the technical, intellectual and ethico-political qualification of its members, whether the parliamentarians or their advisors. This would allow them to top up on the knowledge they need to exercise a legislative function, but also to better organize their information and human resources. After all, for the Legislature to work well, it needs both a competent “political class” and a consistent and well-prepared staff dedicated to providing the parliamentarian with the necessary technical and administrative support. This means increasing and fine-tuning the role of the parties as staff-selection mechanisms.

The full recovery of the Legislature depends on how it comes to be viewed over the course of a reform of the political system. The more democratic this reform is, the more open it is to civil society and the interests of the majority, the more valorized the legislature will become, restoring it to an active role in contemporary life. The resumption of a consistent and wide-ranging strategy for the reform not only of the state apparatus, but of the State itself will certainly play an important role in this operation. After all, the problem assailing the Legislature does not pertain to it alone, but involves the state as a whole.

A “good” Parliament depends on good information and knowledge, in other words, on both the production and organization of data and the analyses and diagnostics used to deliberate upon that data. This requires technical and intellectual operations that promote the self-understanding of societies and consciousness of their citizens. Clarity when it comes to institutional reform and advances in terms of educational programs for Parliament can be obtained through the greater incorporation of critical thought by political systems.

## Hollow Parties

The processes and problems currently undermining the Brazilian Legislature – and sometimes the modern parliament in general – find clear correspondence on the level of one of the main protagonists of the political system: the political parties.

In mid-March, 2009, when the current stage in the Senate crisis was just beginning, the Supreme Electoral Court (TSE) released the findings of a survey on the Brazilian political parties. The material is expressive and warrants close attention.

In January 2008, roughly 90% of Brazilian voters had no formal links to any political party. One year later, this percentage had risen to 91.6%, or 119.7 million people. The comparison calls even more attention when we consider that the electorate grew by 2.9 million voters during that same period, while the number of non-party affiliates rose by 4.3 million.

The trend seems consistent. It affects all parties and in all units of the Federation. The only exception was the Brazilian Republican Party (PRB), connected to the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, which managed to swell its party membership from 121 thousand to 157 thousand. The PMDB alone (the largest party in the country) lost 14% of its adherents (roughly 300 thousand people), with similar percentages of loss incurred by PSDB, DEM and PT. Even the ideological micro-parties, such as the Socialist Unified Workers Party (PSTU) and the Worker's Cause Party (PCO) shrank by 3%.

How can we explain this? Are the parties letting the electorate down or has the latter found new ways of channeling its demands? Is the problem an institutional one that could be resolved with fairer and more adequate legislation? Is it of a moral order, spurred by the “rife corruption” and “high salaries” that have so tarnished the image of politicians in the public eye, as would allege a complicated current of opinion that spans the spectrum from the ultra-conservative right to the far left? Or do we need a well-formulated social critical theory in order to arrive at a rounded comprehension of the facts?

There are no ready answers, but it is easy to see the political impact of this lack of ties. The weakened relationship between parties and the electorate is an indication of the threadbare state of the bonds between society and the political system. It could be that the citizens no longer care all that much about the way they are governed, preferring to distance themselves from representative democracy and its figureheads. However, without the citizens, representation falters and winds up under the monopoly of the parties, which become the sole protagonists, the “owners” of the game, its rules and the results. With this, representative politics becomes the activity of professionals who are not “seen” by the public and who make no attempt to bring the public centre-stage.

It is a delicate issue, as representative democracy continues to be most vital in complex and multi-ethnic societies like our own. In this type of democratic system, the fundamental role of ensuring the operability of politics,



social demands and governmental decisions has fallen to the parties, which were invented precisely to assume such a role.

The parties devote their energies to organizing their ascent to power or their opposition to its current holders. They take it upon themselves to create conditions whereby the partial interests of this or that class can evolve and intersect with the partial interests of other classes, thus giving rise to a common denominator that more faithfully represents the conjunct. Even leftist organizations, which have always refused to limit their activities to the narrow plane of Parliament, represent social groups, to which they lend a voice, sometimes even functioning as the builders of hegemony, of new cultural orientations. It is the parties and the struggles they wage amongst themselves both inside and outside the Parliament that make it possible to process demands democratically and draw up a political agenda.

If the citizens begin to ignore the parties, alarm bells ring. And they ring louder still when we realize that there is small chance of society being able to self-represent or resolve its problems exclusively via “direct participation”.

In order to understand the problem more clearly, we have to look at the way we live. The exodus from political parties has a lot to do with a deep change that has shaken the social order. Some sociologists, such as Zigmunt Bauman, like to use the metaphor of “liquid life” in reference to this occurrence, underscoring the exacerbation of an old process of “melting” that assails all that is “solid” and institutionalized. As a result, uncertainty and insecurity tend to dampen the citizen’s desire for political participation. Others, such as Manuel Castells, speak of a “network society”, underlining the prevalence of information technologies that, by becoming part of everyday life, alter the way we communicate, work and develop our consciousness. Tangling up all the channels of decision-making, in a dynamic in which economics prevails over politics, “network society” saps the power from the hubs (governments, States, parties), causing the citizenry, frustrated by the incapacity of the powers-that-be to control spaces and people, to lose interest.

These configurations marry well with the individualization and democratization so typical of our time, which “free” individuals from their groups of reference and encourage them to think for themselves, that is, to act and decide autonomously, even if following standards set by the media, peer groups and the market. In an environment where everything seems to be out of control, perverse and subtle forms of control tend to spread. The obsession with control (over people and over life itself) dwells paradoxically alongside a boundless desire for freedom. We yearn for more and more control precisely because we do not really control anything at all.

In this manner, society ceases to forge simple and automatic bonds and allegiances, thus hurling identities into turmoil. One can imagine the effects this has on politics.

We ought not take this hypothesis to the letter, as social changes are asymmetrical, spread over lengthy periods and it takes a long time for the

institutions to pick up on them. Yet if these explanations serve any purpose at all it is to alert us to what is going on in the deep rivers by which societies move. They serve to tell us that the institutions have to change, that our practices cannot go on as they are, that political language has to be renewed day by day, regardless of beliefs, books or heroes.

Either democratic politics honors its commitment to secularization and abandons the gods that no longer speak the language of the day or it risks losing value, irremediably.

### **The Republic in Question**

Another interesting indicator of the breadth and gravity of the political crisis can be found in the II Pacto Republicano de Estado por um Sistema de Justiça Mais Acessível, Ágil e Efetivo (Second Republican Pact of the State for a More Accessible, Agile and Effective Legal System), signed by representatives of the three powers of the Federative Republic on March 13, 2009. The presidents of the Federal Court, the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate joined President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva in drafting a six-page document in which they made a commitment to having projects passed that would confer greater accessibility and agility upon the legal system, extending full protection to fundamental human rights.

Curiously, the subject attracted little attention, scarcely even registering on the political agenda.

A pact is both a suspension of litigation and a commitment to defense, something in which two or more parties with different mindsets and private interests agree to assume a mutual commitment in the name of a common good, one of value to all and understood to be under threat. It also demands cooperation and implies a resolution to remain loyal to a cause, principle or institution.

If a republican pact is made it is because the Republic is somehow believed to be at risk, not necessarily mortal risk, but perhaps in danger of not being adequately valued or of misfiring with troubling frequency. If such a pact takes the legal system as its focus it is because the existing system is a mess, malfunctioning or failing to deliver on its duties to society. If the commitment is to make the system more accessible, agile and effective, it is because it is adjudged to be beyond the reach of the average citizen, slow and under-achieving.

If this is the case, as the document suggests it is, then we truly are in the throes of a crisis that is chipping away at the ethical bedrock and institutional foundations of the Brazilian State and threatening the very heart of the Republican system, which beats, as we well know, to the rhythm of the fundamental human rights, law and justice for all.

The list of priority points compiled by the signatories paints a grim picture. It includes, for example, concerns about the penal code and places great emphasis on criminal investigation, the resources for this end, processual prison, provisional

freedom and the criteria for phone tapping and the use of IT in investigations. All in the interests of curbing excesses and protecting the dignity of the individual. The document envisages changes to the Penal Code that would make provisions to deal with crimes by death squads or private militias, as well as legislation covering organized crime and money laundering. There is also concern about the abuse of authority and how to punish agents and civil servants who infringe upon basic rights. The pact also considers improving the Justice Ministry's Victim and Witness Protection Program and labor law as a means of expanding the safety net provided to labor relations.

If we consider the content of the document, the situation would seem to be calamitous. The commitment made by the Three Powers appears to be endorsing the thesis put forward by the President of the Supreme Court, Gilmar Mendes, that Brazil is effectively a "Police state", given the excesses perpetrated by the Federal Police in such operations as Castelo de Areia and Satiagraha, involving bankers, businesspeople, police delegates, politicians and civil servants. The scenario, it seems, is one of horror.

Pacts of this kind have an undeniable symbolic quality. They are signed to suggest or ground a strategy, attract allies and orient a possible plan of action. A lot of it is about making the right noises. In this particular case, it would not be absurd to see the Republican Pact as a means of "settling the score" between the supreme organs of the State. It might, for example, lead to the plugging of leaks in the Federal Police or push for better relations between the Executive and the Legislature. It might dig a trench around the supremacy of the Judicial State over its Administrative or Political counterparts, or serve as a platform for someone's declarations of love for the rites of Justice. In short, nothing unusual in a period in which political conflicts, tensions and differences are breaching the political banks and flooding the terrain of the legal spectacle, taken as more rigorous and impartial. It's the so-called judicialization of politics.

Another way of analyzing the pact is to remember that operations designed to defend and valorize a Republic cannot limit themselves to the protagonism of the powers. A republican mode of governing and organizing the State is that in which the public and private interests are kept separate, the law prevails and the citizenry is free to choose its directors. It requires powers that are alert and legitimate, but it only makes sense and survives if it is run by good politicians and is shot through, from top to bottom, with civic education. A community only has republican value when it is organized and governed by institutions and public habits that are understood and defended by the citizens, who know the value of curtailing a given social class or group's ability to impose its personal interests and privileges over those of any other.

Acts of corruption, the abuse of power or miscarriages of Justice cannot be seen pure and simply as the problem of civil servants, judges or politicians. They are not associated with a degradation of *morality* – that which pertains to moral subjects, who weigh their actions against their own consciences -, but of

*ethics*, which pertains to the ethical subject, whose actions are weighed against the judgments of others. It has a lot more to do with intersubjective life and social organization than with personal character or institutional power.

As far as society can tell, the Second Pact has not had any repercussions on this score, nor any meaningful ramifications. Full of good intentions, it basically served as a thermometer for the state of the Republic and the “indifference” of its citizens. In such a context, it would be surprising if the political class and representative institutions worked properly, pleasing the majority, yielding results and building dams against corruption.

### **Dilemmas and Challenges**

The present crisis is laden with explosive ingredients and the level of debate has sunk so low that we have to believe that some reaction grounded in good sense and political intelligence will arise in the near future. After all, the boat is not adrift, and we cannot say that the nation has exhausted all its reserves of initiative, lucidity and creativity.

However, this is not the most important factor. The real fuel behind the fire resides elsewhere. The crisis coincides with a heightened period of social indifference to organized and institutional politics. Society has convinced itself that an active political system is dispensable. It looks at the present system and finds that when it does work it just causes problems and that when it does not work it makes no difference whatsoever. Having just a “smithering” of State, enough to provide basic services in security, health and education, is quite enough, and may even make life better, especially for the poor.

This line of thought is gaining wider acceptance in society. Dangerously so, as it happens, because it pushes for a less cohesive, less solidary life, more dependent on the effort and initiative of the individual, unable to create equality and ensure rights for all, dominated by “rational” administrative logics armed with scant argument and refractory to contradiction. A life in which there would be “governability”, but not democracy. If society does shake off politics – in other words, if politics does not re-establish positive dialog with the people and public opinion -, then storm clouds will truly come to darken the horizon.

The present crisis therefore coincides with an unprecedented widening gulf between politics and society that is threatening divorce and rupture. The warning bells have started to ring and the red lights flash in Brasília.

Given that the present scenario is neither acceptable nor desirable; that the politicians might be as bad as you like, but at least do not burn money or dispense with votes; that people in society need politics and a political system like a living organism needs air, we can only sustain the hypothesis that the conditions are being laid for a more virtuous encounter between the political and the social.

Weighing against this hypothesis is the fact that the protagonists are absent, precisely the agents of this transformation, those who will lean upon the lever. Even though it is evident that this is just a question of time, of maturation,

of objective conditions, the appearance of these protagonists is also a matter of political will, of determination and existential effort, in other words, of rare and hard-to-find ingredients in such liquid and fast-flowing times as ours.

In its favor, however, is the fact that it is precisely in liquid, fast-moving times that surprising articulations and movements can burst onto the scene as if out of the blue. After all, these are also times of connectivity and pro-active, well-informed individuals that need the other and some measure of political community in order both to pursue their solo careers and organize new and more sonorous groups.

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*ABSTRACT* - This paper aims to explore the idea that we are currently facing a situation of institutional unrest and political crisis strongly concentrated on political subjectivity, that is, on players, ideas and projects of society. It attempts to discuss the recent crisis in Brazil's Senate as an expression of this situation, but also as a reflection of a wider framework, which affects modern Parliaments in general and could be seen as resultant from a siege laid by government decisionism and social pressures to the Legislative branch, depriving it from its axis and capacity to act. Echoing the dominant features of the present time, political systems and, by inference, Parliaments are rendered less able to interact in a virtuous way with culture and social structures that derive from the new terms of globalized life, that is, with plural, fragmented, reflexive, quick and explosive societies.

*KEYWORDS:* Parliaments, Globalization, Political parties, Republic.

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Received on 19.09.2009 and accepted on 21.09.2009.

Translated by Anthony Doyle. The original in Portuguese is available at [http://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?script=sci\\_issuetoc&pid=0103-401420090002&lng=pt&nrm=iso](http://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?script=sci_issuetoc&pid=0103-401420090002&lng=pt&nrm=iso).