

Letter about Perry Anderson's essay

A shorter version on Perry Anderson's essay was originally published as a review in the Times Literary Supplement. I wrote the following letter to the TLS commenting on his reference to my grandfather, Octavio Mangabeira. It was published on March 9, 1989.

Sir, -- In his review of some books of mine (January 13-19), Perry Anderson describes my grandfather, Octavio Mangabeira, as an "oligarch" who "oscillated between fascism and liberalism." Whether a man who, born as the son of a poor pharmacist, abandoned a promising career as an astronomer out of devotion to his political beliefs, spent most of his life in second-class hotel rooms, never owned more than he needed to get through the month, and consequently lacked, at the time of his death, the means to pay for his own burial should be described as an oligarch because he held high political offices, in all of which his overriding goal was to see his people become and remain free citizens, may be a matter of terminology. But more than terminology is involved in the attribution of fascist tendencies to a man who, almost alone among the Brazilian politicians of his generation, chose persecution, prison, poverty and exile rather than compromise with a semi-fascist dictatorship. In his long political career, his only close dealings with right-wing movements took place when, in a desperate effort to prevent the coup of 1937 and the subsequent dictatorship, he organized, around the liberal center, a national political alliance, including both right-wing and left-wing elements. Then, as always, he gave all to defend the political freedom of the people, the consuming passion of his life.

Roberto Mangabeira Unger