

The Brazilian Communist Party and João Goulart's Administration¹

O Partido Comunista Brasileiro e o governo João Goulart

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RESUMO

O artigo tem por objetivo conhecer as estratégias e a atuação do Partido Comunista Brasileiro (PCB) durante o governo Goulart. Os comunistas tiveram diferentes posturas nesse período: na fase parlamentarista de governo, o partido demonstrou distanciamento crítico em relação ao presidente da República. A seguir, durante todo o ano de 1963, o PCB foi opositor de Goulart, recusando a estratégia presidencial de aliar o PTB ao PSD para alcançar maioria no Congresso Nacional. Por fim, de fins de 1963 até o golpe militar no ano seguinte, os comunistas tornaram-se aliados do presidente. A mudança foi motivada pela decisão de Goulart de romper com o PSD e governar com o apoio político das esquerdas.

Palavras-chave: Partido Comunista Brasileiro; governo João Goulart; crise política de 1964.

ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to identify the Brazilian Communist Party's (PCB) strategies and its performance during the administration of João Goulart. Communists held different positions in that period: during the government's parliamentary phase, the party demonstrated a critical distance from the President. Later, in 1963, the PCB opposed Goulart, rejecting the presidential strategy of forming an alliance between the PTB and PSD to obtain a majority in the National Congress. Finally, from late 1963 until the military coup the following year, the communists became the President's allies. This change was motivated by Goulart's decision to break with the PSD and ruling with the political support of left-wing parties.

Keywords: Brazilian Communist Party; João Goulart administration; 1964 political crisis.

In Brazilian historiography the *Partido Comunista do Brasil* (Communist Party of Brazil), afterwards renamed *Partido Comunista Brasileiro* (PCB – the Brazilian Communist Party), is the political party which has most received attention from scholars. Initially it was the actual communist activists who

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wrote the history of the party. Afterwards, historians, sociologists, and political scientists dedicated themselves to examining the PCB and its activities in Brazilian politics.

Much has been written and published about the party. Starting with its first decade in the 1920s, then the participation of communists in the events which resulted in the 1935 insurrection, the period of legality between 1945 and 1947, and the phase which began with the cancelation of the party's registration and resulted in the August 1950 Manifesto.

However, something is curious: following the change which occurred in the party after the March 1958 Declaration and the so-called 'new politics,' interest in the history of the party diminished noticeably. The historiographic production about the period is low compared with previous periods.

While interest in the history of the PCB declines after 1958, it becomes even more scarce during the administration of President João Goulart. In this period the PCB is only cited in a superficial manner. In addition to the generalized expressions which see it as part of the 'left' of the time, the PCB still suffers from prejudicial interpretations of its actions in Brazilian politics. Many define the 'new politics' as a 'lurch to the right,' 'reformism,' 'pacifism,' '*reboquismo*' (being a puppet), 'class conciliation' politics, 'passivity,' an option for 'electoralism,' a 'pacifist' posture and causing the 'immobilization' of the working class, amongst other biased leftwing jargon. All these 'errors' are said to have contributed to the disaster of March 1964 and the military coup.

The aim of this article is to understand the political options and actions of Brazilian communists during the João Goulart administration. For this reason, I draw on the newspaper *Novos Rumos*, published by the PCB, as a privileged source for the research.

THE PCB AND THE 'NEW POLITICS'

In the opinion of José Antonio Segatto, between 1954 and 1958 the PCB underwent a series of events which culminated in a theoretical, political, and organizational reorientation. Three important experiences were important for this: the impact of the suicide of Vargas; the developmentalism of the Kubitschek administration; and the debates arising out of the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. The PCB, the author says, "initiated a process of renewal and the formulation of what became known and recognized by its leadership as a 'new politics'."² The "March 1958 Declaration" was

the principal document which guided the political changes of the Brazilian Communist Party.

Summarized considerably, the document recognized that capitalism was developing in Brazil in an irreversible manner, which favored the struggle for democracy. It was therefore necessary to resolve two contradictions: the first between the nation and imperialism; the second between the advance of productive forces and the relations of semi-feudal production in the countryside. As a result of this “the contradiction between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, expressed in various forms of the class struggle, continued to exist,” José Antonio Segatto argued, “but it did not demand an immediate and radical solution in the present stage.”³ Therefore, the Brazilian revolution would be anti-imperialist, anti-feudal, national, and democratic. In the Brazilian revolutionary process there would be an alliance with the bourgeoisie and with other classes in a Single Front, but at the head of this process would be the proletariat. The Front needed to have proposals for agrarian reform, an independent foreign policy, and the expansion of democratic liberties, amongst other demands, resulting in a nationalist and democratic. With this platform, the March Declaration recognized the “possibility and the feasibility of the peaceful path to the Brazilian revolution,” occurring within democratic and constitutional legality.

The new political direction was a landmark in the history of the PCB, allowing the opening of the party to society. The alliance with the *trabalhistas* (supporters of the PTB) in trade unions, for example, resulted in the political success in various trade unions, federations, and confederations, as well as the foundation of numerous inter-union organizations, culminating in the creation of the *Comando Geral dos Trabalhadores* (CGT – General Command of Workers). The grew party, becoming significant in Brazilian politics.

The party defended the ‘peaceful path to socialism’ – the motive for various critiques after the 1964 military coup. A mistaken image was created of a party which had abandoned the ‘revolutionary’ project and embraced ‘reformism.’ However, it needs to be taken into account that the option for a ‘peaceful [path] to socialism’ adopted by the PCB absolutely did not exclude the alternative of armed revolution. In an article published in *Novos Rumos* at the end of 1961, the question was explained to activists:

In this defense of the feasibility of the peaceful path Brazilian communists are in no way unilateral. They consider it fair and necessary to prepare the masses to carry out a social revolution, whether peacefully or not. What we want is the

revolution. If the reactionary forces impose on our people the armed struggle, and with the objective and subjective conditions being favorable, we shall not hesitate to put ourselves at the head of the people and through armed insurrection fight to conquer power, as communists have done in various parts of the world.⁴

Arguments such as these were explored in various issues of *Novos Rumos* until March 1964. The ‘pacifism’ of the PCB was much more a depreciative expression of its leftwing opponents than an effective practice of the party. Instead the peaceful path did not exclude the option for a revolutionary explosion.

The PCB therefore supported the so-called ‘basic reforms’ (*reformas de base* in Portuguese), a leftwing program defended by João Goulart. Called by the communists the ‘structural reforms of society,’ they became the main program of communists, *trabalhistas*, nationalists and other leftwing forces. Agrarian reform was the central demand, but also included were urban, administrative, bank and university reform, as well as the extension of the vote to the illiterate and to non-commissioned officers of the Armed Forces, as well as the legalization of the Communist Party. How did the communists interpret the basic reforms and which horizon did they point towards?

The communists understood that there was a process of political polarization in the country. At the center of the clash between the forces of right and left was the dispute for power. In July 1962, Giocondo Dias, a member of the Executive Commission of the Central Committee of the PCB, wrote in *Novos Rumos*:

In a moment like the present, when... the conviction that a new Power is necessary becomes generalized, and the revolutionary process is accelerating, it is perfectly understandable that the struggle and political and ideological divergences become more acute. It is because the question of power becomes ever more sensitive. On the one hand, the outdated forces of society seek to find the means to keep power in their hands. On the other, progressive and revolutionary forces make efforts to look for paths which can lead to the emergence of a new political power, which will serve the nation and the people. Between these two systems of forces there naturally exists a complete antagonism.⁵

Sometime later in January 1964, Giocondo Dias wrote another article alerting party activists. The title was suggestive: “The revolutionary meaning of the struggle for reforms.”⁶ In Dias’ view the importance of the basic reforms

had been understood by millions of Brazilians, but still caused doubts among party members, resulting in two deviations. There were those in the PCB who understood the reforms as the “final aim” of the party. For Giocondo, these members did not consider the basic reforms “as a moment or a phase in a revolutionary process, which would culminate in the triumph of socialism.” Those who thought that the basic reforms were an end in themselves, he continued, were part of the “rightwing and profoundly noxious tendency: reformism.”

However, others demonstrated doubts about the “revolutionary content of the struggle for reforms.” They saw it as a “reformist” struggle. Giocondo Dias describes these members as a “sectarian tendency,” whose orthodoxy did not let them see “clearly the revolutionary process underway in the country.” Giocondo Dias criticized his party comrades, but also its allies, “especially among the youth and intellectuals” who distinguished “between reforms and revolution.” It was a profound error, in his words, to compare the present with the time of the 1917 October Revolution in Russia. For Giocondo Dias, the basic reforms would allow

the ending of the dominion of our economy by American imperialists, extinguishing the monopoly of land, and with this the power of the *latifundiários* (ranchers) as a class, the substantial increase in the living standards of the great masses of workers, and on a foundation of a real expansion of the democratic rights of the people, which will allow them to decisively influence the conducting of the political life of the country... For the working classes the structural reforms have to represent a link in the revolutionary process which will culminate with the advent and the construction of socialism.

The implementation of the basic reforms thereby pointed the way to socialism. The reforms were revolutionary. According to Giocondo Dias it was necessary to criticize those who insisted on “counterpoising reforms to revolution – whether to consider them as an end in themselves, as the reformists wanted, or to deny them any role in the revolutionary process, as the ultra-left prattlers do.” The structural reforms in this sense were the conditions for achieving the “Brazilian revolution.”

THE COMMUNIST PARTY AND THE LEFT

In the few studies of the left in the Goulart administration, the citation of some parties and organization active in the period is very common: the PCB,

Organização Revolucionária Marxista (Revolutionary Marxist Organization) – *Política Operária* (ORM-Polop – Workers Politics), *Ação Popular* (AP – Popular Action), *Partido Operário Revolucionário – Trotskista* (POR-T – Revolutionary Workers Party – Trotskyite) and the *Partido Comunista do Brasil* (PCdoB – Communist Party of Brazil). These organizations are understood as ‘the left’ of the time.

The PCB was the main Marxist party at the time. After 1958, when it abandoned the sectarian and ultra-leftist policy it had adopted in 1947, the party grew. Until the military coup of 1964 it experienced a period of great vitality. It acquired importance in Brazilian society, exercising a strong influence on urban trade unionism, working in peasant organizations, participating in various social movements with great prestige among Brazilian intellectuals.

This was not the case of the PCdoB, which emerged in 1962 out of a split in the PCB. It was an a much more embryonic organization at that time. The same can be said of POR-Ta party defined by Marcelo Ridenti as a “minuscule Trotskyite-Poseur grouping” (Ridenti, 1993, p.27). Polop and AP were more significant, though among the student movement – not among workers or the trade union movement.

Various leftwing parties, organizations, movements and front were active during the Goulart administration, but these receive scarce references in the specialized bibliography. To begin with the national-revolutionaries who in the *Partido Trabalhista Brasileiro* (PTB – Brazilian Labor Party) followed the leadership of Leonel Brizola. Also in the PTB was the Compact Group, parliamentarians independent of Goulart or Brizola who defended the basic reforms, especially the agrarian ones. Another very important was the *Frente Parlamentar Nacionalista* (FPN – Parliamentary Nationalist Front), which involved parliamentarians committed to nationalism and reforms. A small party which acted in the leftwing sphere was the *Partido Socialista Brasileiro* (PSB – Brazilian Socialist Party).

Various organizations defended reformist projects. Starting with CGT, a trade union confederation under the leadership of *trabalhistas* and communists who organized urban workers. Students were represented in the *União Nacional dos Estudantes* (UNE – National Union of Students) and the *União Brasileira dos Estudantes Secundaristas* (UBES – Brazilian Secondary School Students’ Union), both led by AP and PCB. Among the military, the sergeants of the Armed Forces and sailors and marines from the Navy were engaged in nationalist and leftwing movements. Peasant struggles gained expression with the emergence of the Peasant Leagues and the leadership of Francisco Julião.

In the Northeast of the country Governor Miguel Arraes gained great prestige among the left.

There, thus, existed, parties, movements, fronts, and organizations of different variations, with it being very difficult to reduce the left as a whole solely to the PCB and the AP, as well as the small political parties, such as the PCdoB, POR-T, and Polop.

With immense prestige among the left, at the beginning of 1963 Leonel Brizola united various left parties, groups, and movements in the *Frente de Mobilização Popular* (FMP – Popular Mobilization Front). In the words of Ruy Mauro Marini, the FMP acted like a “parliament of the left.”⁷⁷ Participating in the Front were the CGT, *Confederação Nacional dos Trabalhadores na Indústria* (CNTI – the National Confederation of Industrial Workers), *Pacto de Unidade* (PUA – Unity Pact) and *Confederação Nacional dos Trabalhadores nas Empresas de Crédito* (Contec – National Confederation of Workers in Credit Companies); UNE and UBES; *Comando dos Trabalhadores Intelectuais* (CTI – Intellectual Workers’ Command), the non-commissioned officers of the Armed Forces, such as sergeants, sailors and naval marines through their associations; factions of the Peasant Leagues; groups of the revolutionary left such as the AP, POR-T, the national-revolutionaries who followed the leadership of Leonel Brizola, and segments of the extreme left of the PCB; *Frente Parlamentar Nacionalista* (Nationalist Parliamentary Front); parliamentarians from the Compact Group of PTB, the PSB and *Partido Social Progressista* (PSP – Progressive Social Party). Miguel Arraes and his political group were also part of the Front, although they remained independent in relation to Brizola.

FMP pressurized João Goulart to immediately decree the basic reforms, to move away from the *Partido Social Democrático* (PSD – Social Democratic Party), and to enter into direct conflict with rightwing groups. Leonel Brizola and the left in the FMP still presented themselves as a force of the left which could make reforms feasible in the place of the PCB, a party interpreted as moderate in relation to the social struggles of the time.

THE COMMUNISTS AND THE PARLIAMENTARIAN GOVERNMENT

It is very common to refer to the Goulart administration as a single and undifferentiated period. However, the parliamentarian and the presidential phases have to be distinguished. During the parliamentarian period between September 1961, when he took office as president of the Brazilian republic, and January 1963 – and his victory in the plebiscite which gave him presidential

powers –, Goulart did not govern the country. Rather it was ruled by a cabinet system. Therefore, the right could neither accuse Jango because of the threat of the ‘communization’ of the country, nor could the left accuse him of not implementing the basic reforms.

In the parliamentary phase, the PCB adopted a deliberate policy in relation to the president: silence and hostility. In the first two months of 1962, there is not a single reference to President João Goulart in the weekly newspaper *Novos Rumos*, the official organ of the PCB. Nor a photograph. The PCB newspaper ignored his existence. Only in the March 1962 issue would Goulart be mentioned by the newspaper, and even then to be harshly criticized for his initiative of visiting the United States.⁸

At the beginning of April more criticism was made. The motive was the presidential speech given in the American Chamber of Commerce made during his trip to the United State. The theme was the nationalizations of US companies by the governor of Rio Grande do Sul, Leonel Brizola. According to *Novos Rumos*, Goulart proved his “capitulation to US imperialism.” According to an editorial on the first page of *Novos Rumos*:

The president of Brazil behaved like an arduous advocate of Yankee monopolistic interests. It is known that public services in general ‘function badly, function inadequately and insufficiently’. Large areas of attrition and friction are created between public opinion and the utility companies ... If the services are bad, are inadequate and insufficient, it is because the utility companies do not meet the principal obligation of their contracts ... Now Mr. João Goulart comes and proposes nothing less than awarding our exploiters ... Mr. João Goulart’s speech deserves the repulsion of all patriots.⁹

Goulart appeared in a very superficial manner in *Novos Rumos*: sometimes with depreciative reports, sometimes supporting causes defended by the communists. In April a denunciation was published that Jango and Lacerda had united to benefit the US telephone company in the state of Guanabara. In May Jango’s name was cited in the newspaper due to his support for a peace congress organized by communists in Helsinki. In the following month the president was mentioned again for the same reason: support for causes defended by communists. In this case Goulart defended the increase of trade with the Soviet Union.¹⁰

During the parliamentary regime, Goulart was put under pressure due to his political opinions. In June 1962, following the resignation of the Tancredo

Neves cabinet, *Novos Rumos* published on its front page: "All over the country the demands of the masses are unanimous: a nationalist government."¹¹ The communists wanted Goulart to appoint a leftwing prime minister. In the following month the PCB newspaper published the following headline on its front page: "General Strike! Millions of workers demand from João Goulart: A Nationalist cabinet!" On the same page under the title "No reconciliation with the enemies of the people," Luís Carlos Prestes harshly criticized Jango: "The facts... are clear, after nine months of the Tancredo Neves cabinet, not only the failure of this government, but also the failure of the conciliation policies with the forces which represent the interests of the *latifúndios* and imperialism."¹²

Goulart was again mentioned in *Novos Rumos* in September. It was noted that in August 1960 he had defended the legality of the PCB. In November he reappeared when he defended the self-determination of people, referring to Cuba.¹³

Until the plebiscite which occurred in 6 January 1963, the communists treated Jango with a certain distance. They ignored the existence of the president, mentioned him when it suited their interests, or criticized him aggressively, thereby undermining the images which defined the PCB as 'an auxiliary' of Jango or being in his 'wake.'

Leonel Brizola was treated by *Novos Rumos* in a very different manner. His declarations were prominently reported. He was a constant presence in *Novos Rumos*, especially when he defended nationalist measures, refused alliances with the PSD, and criticized Goulart for not carrying out the basic reforms. Another leftwing leader *Novos Rumos* gave prestige to was Miguel Arraes. Both were of interest to the communists as allies in the formation of a Single Left Front (*Frente Única de Esquerda*). This was not the case of Francisco Julião. Rivals of the communists in the mobilization of rural workers, Julião and the Peasant Leagues rarely appeared in the pages of *Novos Rumos*, and then only to suffer harsh critiques.

After the January 1963 plebiscite when Goulart began to govern in a presidential system the PCB and the Popular Mobilization Front (*Frente de Mobilização Popular*), founded that month, formed the two largest leftwing organizations.

Initially relations between them were tense. Leonel Brizola founded the FMP to directly dispute with the PCB leadership of the left. Since the Legality Campaign Brizola had competed with Goulart for the leadership of the reformist movement and the PTB. At the beginning of 1963, he also entered into competition with Prestes himself.

However, the communists had a diverse posture. The PCB leadership perceived the expansion of the FMP and the leadership capacity of Leonel Brizola. Even before the foundation of the FMP, the communists had held him in high-esteem, constantly citing him in *Novos Rumos*. Purposefully they avoided conflicts with Brizola and made an effort to establish an alliance with the FMP. In September 1963, a text published in *Novos Rumos* marked the position of the PCB in relation to the front led by Brizola:

The communists consider that the FMP, which emerged in the struggle for the grassroots reform, represents an important step towards the coordination of the forces of a single nationalist and democratic front. The difficulties in this area are understandable. The divergences are natural. However, what is indispensable is that the divergences and difficulties are faced with a unitary spirit, so that they can be overcome and the common struggle can continue to advance.¹⁴

To achieve the unity of the left in the Single Front the communists made an effort to have the FMP as an ally. However, the left united in the FMP ignored the PCB. In the pages of *Panfletos. O jornal do homem do povo* (Pamphlet, the newspaper of the men of the people), edited by the national-revolutionary group and the voice of the FMP, the PCB and Luís Carlos Prestes never received even a single mention.

THE COMMUNISTS AND GOULART'S PRESIDENTIAL ADMINISTRATION

When he took office as president, Jango chose the strategy of obtaining a majority in the National Congress by reinforcing the alliance of the PTB with the PSD. He thereby repeated the parliamentary coalition which had given political stability to Juscelino Kubitschek. The center-left alliance had to make agreements and compromise to pass the reforms. They needed to be approved by institutional means and for this having a parliamentary majority with the PTB-PSD alliance in the National Congress was fundamental in the president's strategy (see Ferreira, 2011; Figueiredo, 1993).

However, Goulart's political decision suffered systematic opposition from the left. This was a serious problem faced by his government. Leonel Brizola, Luís Carlos Prestes, Miguel Arraes and Francisco Julião were against the alliance with the PSD. Also opposed to it were the CGT, UNE and the Peasant Leagues. The left in the FMP repudiated the presidential strategy to obtain a majority in the National Congress through an alliance with the PSD.

The communists were also strident critics of Goulart's strategy. The PCB sang in chorus with the FMP, refuting Jango's political decision to look for an alliance with the PSD. The choice of a party alliance with the PSD was called by the left at that time as a 'reconciliation policy.' Something interpreted as very negative.

Criticism of Jango for wanting the PSD as an ally was common in *Novos Rumos*. For the communists, Goulart needed to "break with the reconciliation policy that he has been following, to undo the alliance with the retrograde leadership of the PSD, and to recreate the system of forces which created it."¹⁵ In an editorial published in September 1963 it stated:

Mr. João Goulart has reconciled exactly with the enemies that should be fought, with the representatives and defenders of *latifúndio* and imperialism ... Unity is one thing. Reconciliation is another. And the demands of the nationalist and democratic struggles indicate that it is necessary to strengthen the unity of all those who meet in this trench to develop with greater vigor the struggle and the fight against the policy of reconciliation and the defeat it, in order to isolate and knock out the principal enemies of our people.¹⁶

The alternative defended by the communists was the same as the Popular Mobilization Front: breaking with the PSD and the formation of an exclusive leftwing government – the Single Front.

Jango was supposed to break with the PSD and expect nothing from the National Congress, an institution seen as reactionary. The basic reforms would not be approved through parliament, the leftwing leaders argued. Both the PCB and its leader Luís Carlos Prestes and Leonel Brizola speaking in the name of FMP defended the same political alternative: Goulart needed to create an exclusively leftwing government.

If Goulart had ended his alliance with the PSD and other center parties, as the left wanted, he would have lost his majority in the National Congress and opposition to his administration would have grown amongst parliamentarians. For the PCB and the FMP this problem would have been resolved through popular pressure on the streets against the National Congress. According to a text published in *Novos Rumos*,

It will be by this path that Mr. João Goulart can count on the support of the overwhelming majority of the Nation, on those forces which are effectively decisive, whose coordinated action will also have an influence on Parliament itself, and

which will be capable of breaking its reactionary resistance and achieving the basic reforms and the necessary constitutional amendments.

With the left united in the FMP allied to the PCB, the CGT, and the political group of Miguel Arraes, the reforms would be forced out of Congress through the mobilization of the people in the public sphere.

However, the communists admitted that there was a “discrepancy between the advance of the country in the mass movement, its organization and unity, and the situation of the leaders.” These leaders “despite the efforts represented by the Popular Mobilization Front, have still not overcome the hitches which prevent unitary and convergent actions.” What this referred to was the dispute of Leonel Brizola and Luís Carlos Prestes for the leadership of the reformist movement. The communists preached the need for the “strengthening of the single front,” in other words the formation of a front between the PCB and the FMP. The communists thus had an identical project to the FMP – Goulart had to break with the PSD and form an exclusively leftwing government. According to a text published in *Novos Rumos*:

The formation of a new government, supported by nationalist and democratic forces and formed by men linked to the latter, is not an unstoppable demand of the overwhelming majority of the Nation. Only a government of this type, armed with a program of strong patriotic and progressive inspiration, and counting on the decided support of the large mass of the people, will be able to convert into reality the structural reforms, dealing a blow to imperialist plundering and suppressing the hateful privileges which are leading our people to an ever more afflictive situation.¹⁷

THE COMMUNISTS AND THE CRISIS OF THE GOULART ADMINISTRATION

The communists supported the Sergeants’ Rebellion in Brasília on 12 September 1963. The taking over of the Brazilian capital by around six hundred sergeants and marines was interpreted as the ‘democratic’ and ‘patriotic’ struggles of low ranking soldiers. The title of *Novos Rumos* was: “Sergeants are our brothers.”¹⁸

The Sergeants’ Rebellion weakened the Goulart administration. The right was frightened by the episode. If a group of sergeants and marines could take over the capital and arrest the heads of the legislative and judicial powers, what

could the *Janguista* wing of the army do, with its generals and mid-ranking officers who commanded troops? According to Alzira Alves Abreu, the Sergeants' Rebellion was the "moment of inflection of the position of the press in relation to the Goulart administration."¹⁹ Nevertheless, the communists remained optimistic.

A new crisis occurred on 1 October, when the *Tribuna da Imprensa* published an interview of Carlos Lacerda with the *Los Angeles Times*. Lacerda insulted Goulart, asked for the interference of the US government in the Brazilian political process and stated that the Armed Forces would carry out a *coup d'état*.

The military ministers were furious with Lacerda and asked the president to declare a state of siege. The intention was to arrest Lacerda. Goulart sent a message to the Congress asking for authorization to declare a state of siege in the country. Rightwing, leftwing, and liberal parliamentarians were against this. The PCB and FMP were also opposed to the measure.

With the headline "The Siege was against the people," *Novos Rumos* stated that Leonel Brizola in the name of the FMP, Sérgio Magalhães representing the FPN, Miguel Arraes, and the trade union movement had closed ranks against the state of siege. Also according to *Novos Rumos*, on 6 October the President "met a delegation of the Popular Mobilization Front, representing the various organizations of the nationalist, trade union, and student movements." At the end Goulart promised to withdraw from Congress the request for the state of siege and "impress a direction on his government according to the demands formulated by the nationalist forces."²⁰

Isolated and strongly under pressure from various political forces, Goulart gave in. After that the attacks on the president from the left and right increased in tone. The communists repeated the proposal for the formation of a Single Left Front. In a manifesto published in *Novos Rumos*, shortly after Goulart's defeat in his request for a state of siege, the leadership of the PCB declared:

The nationalist and democratic forces, having defeated the attempt to implement the state of siege, have achieved an important political victory. The facts reveal that the unity of the single front achieved its highest level and that its amplitude is greater, and consequently its influence in the country is growing... The facts show the preeminent need for a new policy to be adopted, which will resolve immediate questions and move forwards the basic reforms. A government like the current one, which is based on the compromise with the retrograde leadership of the PSD and with other reactionary forces, will not implement this policy.

Therefore, a reformulation of the system of forces which constitute the current government is necessary, with the substitution of sectors distanced from the aspirations of the people by representatives of political and social currents willing to support this new policy in Parliament and on the streets.²¹

The communists insisted on the political proposal of forming an exclusively leftwing government, with the exclusion of the PSD. For this it was necessary that Leonel Brizola would accept the communist proposal and form the Single Left Front – the union of the PCB and the FMP – to govern the country. Goulart though would also have to accept to form a ministry solely with the members of the Single Front.

The question returned to the political debate in December 1963, when Goulart proposed to change some of his ministers. The left in the Popular Mobilization Front demanded that the Minister of Finance be given to Leonel Brizola, with the support of PCB. According to *Novos Rumos*, “how to expect basic reforms from a government which is the product of the alliance with the retrograde leadership of the PSD?” For the communists, Brizola’s appointment as Minister of Finance would signify “the constitution of another system of forces, nationalist and democratic ... and would allow the resistance of reaction to be overcome, including within Parliament, and would smash the defeatist conspiracy.”²²

For the FMP and PCB, Brizola’s appointment as Minister of Finance would signify the formation of a new and exclusively leftwing government. However, it would also mean that the strongman of the government would be Leonel Brizola. Goulart would in practice be handing over the government to him. Something which the president could not do. By appointing Nei Galvão, a career civil servant, as Minister of Finance, Jango once again tried to unite the PTB and PSD, but this initiative resulted in the increased hostility of the FMP.

The PCB and the FMP were growing closer. The front led by Brizola, *Novos Rumos* reported, was politically successful because it was created “taking into account the reality of the mass democratic movement.” In the opinion of the communists, the Popular Mobilization Front, instead of being an artificial structure, brought together “what was already organized, such as the workers movement, students, intellectual, peasants, and also the Nationalist Parliamentary Front and the nationalist military.” According to *Novos Rumos*, “the FMP could perform the function of being the most combative and radical group of the Single Front.”²³

Miguel Arraes pointed to the same path. In a statement published in *Novos Rumos*, he supported the decision of the FMP about the formation of a leftwing government: "The note that the Popular Mobilization Front released to establish its position in relation to the national crisis, and taking into account the need for a new economic and social policy, has my total support."²⁴

At the end of 1963, Luís Carlos Prestes at the head of the PCB was in agreement with the theses of two important left leaders in the country: Leonel Brizola and Miguel Arraes. Goulart had to break with the PSD and govern with them, forming an exclusively leftwing government.

THE COMMUNISTS AND THE PROGRESSIVE FRONT

The Goulart administration reached the end of 1963 with the economic situation out of control. GDP had grown by 1%, while inflation had risen to 78%. Entrepreneurs did not believe in the capacity of the government to contain the financial disorder, while workers suffered from increased prices and shortages of merchandise. Frightened by the radicalization of the PTB and the left, the PSD drew closer to the UDN in the Congress. After the frustrating episode of Goulart's attempt to obtain exceptional powers through the state of siege, rightwing plotters began to openly conspire against the government, while the left in the FMP, with the support of the PCB, increased its criticism of the president in an aggressive manner. Goulart reached the end of 1963 politically isolated. This was of great concern for the stability of the democratic regime.

The *trabalhista* deputy San Tiago Dantas, with great prestige in the political milieu, realized the danger that political radicalization could cause for the stability of the regime. With the aim of isolating the *golpista* right (i.e., the ones supporting a coup), particularly the groups led by Carlos Lacerda and Ademar de Barros, and the radical left grouped in the FMP and its leader Leonel Brizola, San Tiago Dantas proposed the formation of the *Frente Progressista de Apoio às Reformas de Base* (Progressive Front for the Support of the Basic Reforms).²⁵ Dantas wanted to regroup the center-left forces and isolate the civil-military right. The parliamentary base of the Progressive Front would be the PTB, who did not follow the leadership of Brizola, the PSD, and other center parties. The leftwing groups courted by Dantas to enter the Progressive Front were the PCB, Miguel Arraes, and trade unionists not part of the political line of the CGT.

Isolating the radical left, breaking-up the *golpista* right, and forming a strong center-left political support group would guarantee the continuity of

the democratic process and also allow the approval of the basic reforms. These were the political proposals of San Tiago Dantas.

Leonel Brizola, in the name of the FMP, vehemently rejected the proposal of the progressive Front. Miguel Arraes preferred to support the FMP. Agreeing with Brizola, Arraes adopted the strategy of popular pressure on the streets on the Congress to approve the reforms. Moreover, he agreed with Brizola and Prestes' theses: Goulart should break with the PSD and form an exclusively leftwing government.²⁶

For the Progressive Front to be center-left, what was left was the adhesion of the PCB. After all, it was the great Marxist leftwing party. On 18 January 1964, the communists gave their opinion of the program proposed by San Tiago Dantas. Initially the leaders of the PCB were skeptical. To participate in the Progressive Front "a reformulation of system of forces which constitute the present one"²⁷ was necessary. Unlike Miguel Arraes, Leonel Brizola, and the FMP, the communists opened negotiations about the possibility of joining the Progressive Front.

However, at the beginning of March 1964, Luís Carlos Prestes published a text in *Novos Rumos*. He stated he had reached some understandings with San Tiago Dantas, but that in programmatic terms the PCB was very close to the arguments of the FMP. To join the Progressive Front the PCB demanded agrarian reform without indemnification; the suspension of the remittance of profits abroad and payments of debts with foreign creditors; nationalization of foreign companies in the areas of mills, milk powder and pharmaceutical factories; a monopoly of exchange for Banco do Brasil and of coffee exports; wage increases according to inflation indices and participation of trade unions in the appointment of directors of state companies; an independent foreign policy, as well as a revocation of articles of the Law of National Security, electoral reform, amnesty of the sergeants who had taken over Brasília and the legalization of PCB, amongst other questions.²⁸ Many of the demands of Luís Carlos Prestes implied changes to the Constitution, which depended on the Congress – and not only the will of Goulart. In practice Prestes' demands made the participation of the PCB in the Progressive Front unfeasible.

At that moment the communist leader and Goulart were trying to reach a political understanding. The rally of 13 March in the Central do Brasil station was being prepared. As is a consensus in the bibliography, the rally signified the alliance of the president with the left (PCB, FMP and Miguel Arraes) and the trade union movement (CGT). The PCB's political proposal for the formation of the Single Front had been victorious.

GOVERNMENT OF THE LEFT

Realizing that the political radicalization would prevent an agreement between the PTB and the PSD, Goulart opted for the strategy demanded by the left organized in the FMP, by the PCB, the CGT, and by Miguel Arraes: the ending of the government with the PSD and the formation of an exclusively leftwing government. Organized by a group of trade unionists, the announcement of the rally on 13 March 1964 expressed the alliance of the President with the left and the trade union movement. Hércules Corrêa, representative of the PCB in the CGT, wrote an article in *Novos Rumos*: in the rally the “representatives of the different democratic currents” demanded the following points from the President: agrarian reform, bank reform, electoral reform, strengthening of Petrobrás, the right of soldiers, NCOs, and sailors, and illiterates to votes, and an amnesty to the sergeants who rebelled in September 1963, amongst other measures.²⁹ Hércules Corrêa's demands showed that the negotiations between the left (PCB, FMP and CGT) and João Goulart were still ongoing.

After December, and especially in the first months of 1964, the PCB's position towards João Goulart changed. From a strong opponent it became an ally. The president had finally accepted the terms of the PCB, FMP, CGT and Miguel Arraes' political group to form a new government and to promote a 'new policy.' In a text published at the end of February, *Novos Rumos* did not hide the conversations with Goulart about the leftwing government and the reformist program: “Starting from this position the communists face the political understandings which are currently being made in the country... for the formation of a progressive front.”³⁰

The communists confirmed the 'political understandings' with the president. It was in this political scenario, the alliance of Goulart with the left in the FMP, the CGT, and the PCB, that the anti-communist discourse gained amplitude and repercussion in society. The anti-communist campaign grew and found resonance in society because Jango was actually allying himself with the left.

On 17 March, Luís Carlos Prestes spoke at the *Associação Brasileira de Imprensa* (Brazilian Press Association) to around one thousand people. His analysis of the Brazilian political scenario, four days after the Central do Brasil rally, presents an understanding of the political position of the communists at a moment of great polarization between left and right. For Prestes the rally was an event of great and profound significance for the country. “The political significance of this rally will be verified in practice in the coming months, perhaps even in the next weeks or next days.”³¹ According to him, people went

to the rally to “ask the President if he was willing to put himself at the front of the democratic and revolutionary process which was advancing.” The struggle was for reforms, but on the horizon was socialism:

Since 1961 we communists have systemically fought against his policy of reconciliation, of compromises with imperialists and *latifúndio*. And it is precisely for this, because we have strongly fought against the reconciliation policy that we cannot not give our support to the gestures of the president which means breaking the reconciliation policy... Today fighting for socialism is fighting for the victory of the national and democratic revolution, and ending with the obstacles which have prevented progress in our country, it is fighting to expel from our country the imperialist monopolies, it is fighting for agrarian reform. We are aware that this is how we are fighting for socialism.

After criticizing his own party for the radical leftism adopted since 1947, Prestes stated that since 1958, with the “political about-turn,” the Communist Party had prepared “tactics to really reach the revolutionary power we aim at.” The target of the communists “is revolutionary power,” expelling from Brazil US companies, and achieving agrarian reform. These were “the tasks for the revolution in the current step, because completing the tasks of the current revolution is the way to open the path to the next step, it is opening the way to socialism in our country.” Prestes stated that, “this is what we call the peaceful path.” He alleged that it was in the interest of workers “to reach, without insurrection and without civil war, through the struggles of the masses ... government and revolutionary power.”

Prestes praised Goulart’s foreign policy initiatives and his support for the struggles of workers. However, he did not spare criticism of his insistence to ally himself with the PSD.

Nevertheless, it seems that since the end of last year, President Goulart has begun to understand that no success can come from these paths, that his reconciliation policy, his concern with maintaining in the government representatives of the reactionary leadership of the PSD, in order to have a majority in Congress, will lead to nothing positive, because this majority will not assure him any reform, will not facilitate any advance, no step forwards in the solution of Brazilian problems.

Jango’s change came in December 1963, Prestes said, when he was sought out by the “political coordinator of President Goulart with the aim of organizing a broad front.” Prestes publically admitted that the President had sought to reach

an understanding with the communists. Although the front proposed by San Tiago Dantas did not move forwards, the result according to Prestes the result was the unification of the forces of the left in Central do Brasil rally.

The understandings to unify the “patriotic and democratic” forces of the country came out of a “slow and difficult process.” However, according to his view, the “organic structure of the single front” of the left in Brazilian politics emerged with

the Popular Mobilization Front, which grouped the most important forces in a single front, from the working class to the patriotic military, intellectuals, peasants, students. FMP was constituted as the core of this most important forces and it is possible that other forces will group around it, expanding it.

Prestes recognized the political force of the FMP and its importance in the formation of the Single Left Front. According to him,

the single front advances, and will tend to consolidate, the elements have already been drawn up for a certain structuring of his unity, because after the understandings, it seems we reached a unity platform which could be accepted by President Goulart, Deputy Brizola, Governor Arraes, and the other forces of the single front, even the communists.

The result of this process of the union of the forces of the left was the Central do Brasil rally. However, Luís Carlos Prestes that at that moment Brazil was experiencing a growing political radicalization between right and left:

The rally determined a sharpening of the contradiction between the patriotic and democratic forces, which are with President Goulart in the positions he assumes, and the reactionary and defeatists forces who effectively will tend to unify themselves. We thus are facing a process of polarization of forces, and President Goulart, who drew support from the masses to adopt this attitude, given the unification of reactionary forces, and the increasing despair of the reactionaries, the support of the people, popular support, will be needed more than ever to face this reaction.

Prestes was not unaware of the ongoing growth of political radicalization and admitted the probable reaction of the right. However, with popular support, coup attempts would be defeated. One more motive, therefore, to form an exclusively leftwing government:

we effectively need another government. Precisely because the process of polarization between patriots and nationalists, on the one hand, and reactionaries and defeatists on the other is advancing, more than ever a government is indispensable... which is supported by the single front, a government constituted by the political leaders of this single front.

Luís Carlos Prestes spoke about the previously established agreements with João Goulart and left leaders. In the edition of *Novos Rumos* from the week before the military coup, the newspaper defended Goulart from the attacks coming from the right and informed readers about the understandings which occurred in Brasília and Guanabara. After meetings with Goulart, the “General Command of Workers, the Nationalist Parliamentary Front, the PTB, the ‘agressivos’ of the PSD, the ‘bossa nova’ of UDN, Popular Action, UNE, the Command of Intellectual Workers, as well as the other entities, agreed among themselves the formation of the Popular Front.”³² Also according *Novos Rumos*, “in these understanding Governor Miguel Arraes and Deputy Brizola participated.” The conversations aimed at forming the Popular Front program and recreating the government: “Imposing the reforms and creating a new Ministry, without reconciliation with the saboteurs of the reforms, are inseparable reforms.”

At the end of the Goulart administration the communists’ political proposal was victorious. The Single Left Front, called the Popular Front, would start to govern the country, excluding the political forces of the center, such as the PSD. Even without a majority in Congress, the Popular Front would achieve the reforms by pressurizing parliamentarians with popular mobilizations – rallies, strikes, and marches, amongst other actions.

The 13 March rally in Central do Brasil was the first of another seven arranged for the month of April which would be held in the cities of Santos, Santo André, Salvador, Ribeirão Preto, Belo Horizonte and Brasília. The final one was marked for 1 May in São Paulo, giving rise to a general strike whose objective was to pressurize the Congress to approve the basic reforms.

FINAL WORDS

During the Goulart administration, the communists selected their strategies and adopted distinct positions. In the parliamentary phase of the government, the PCB ignored the President. Towards João Goulart the communists expressed disdain, rather than criticism, and sometimes hostility. In the

presidential phase of the administration, the communists continued in the opposition, but continued to demand from it the removal of the PSD and the formation of an exclusively leftwing government, involving the PCB, the FMP, CGT and the political group of Miguel Arraes in the Single Front. Goulart's resistance to ending the alliance with the PSD provoked very critical positions from the communists.

The third phase of the PCB during the Goulart administration began when the president, at the end of 1963, became close to the left and allied with them. The communist proposal for the Single Front was victorious. From this moment onwards the communists started to support the Goulart administration.

The military coup which occurred on 31 March and 1 April interrupted the ongoing process, resulting in the dictatorship. The first initiatives of the military government, not by chance, were to persecute the left, particularly *trabalhistas* and communists, and the trade union movement.

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NOTES

¹ This article is the result of research financed by CNPq.

² SEGATTO, 1995, p.33. This is an indispensable book for the study of this temporality of the history of the PCB.

³ *Ibidem*, p.80-81.

⁴ *Novos Rumos*, Rio de Janeiro, n.151, 20 Dec.-4 Jan. 1962, p.4.

⁵ *Novos Rumos*, n.176, 29 Jun.-5 Jul. 1962, p.3.

⁶ *Novos Rumos*, n.255, 10-16 Jan. 1964, p.3.

⁷ Quoted in DELGADO, 1989, p.236. In relation to the Popular Mobilization Front, see FERREIRA, 2004; 2009.

⁸ *Novos Rumos*, n.161, 16-22 Mar. 1962, p.1.

⁹ *Novos Rumos*, n.163, 30 Mar.-5 Apr. 1962, p.1.

¹⁰ The three references to Goulart in April, May, and June, are in *Novos Rumos*, n.164, 6-12 Apr. 1962, p.3; n.168, 4-10 May 1962, p.7; e n.172, 1-7 Jun. 1962, p.8.

¹¹ *Novos Rumos*, n.175, 22-28 Jun. 1962, p.1.

¹² *Novos Rumos*, n.177, 6 Jul. 1962, p.1.

¹³ *Novos Rumos*, n.181, 3-9 Aug. 1962, p.8 and n.194, 3-9 Nov. 1962, p.2, respectively.

¹⁴ *Novos Rumos*, n.236, 30 Aug.-5 Sept. 1963, p.3.

¹⁵ *Novos Rumos*, n.249, 29 Nov.-5 Dec. 1963, p.1.

¹⁶ *Novos Rumos*, n.238, 13-19 Sept. 1963, p.3. The following citations are from the same source.

¹⁷ *Novos Rumos*, n.252, 20-26 Dec. 1963, p.1.

¹⁸ *Novos Rumos*, n.239, 20-26 Sept. 1963, p.8.

¹⁹ See ABREU, Alzira Alves in FERREIRA, 2006, p.117.

²⁰ *Novos Rumos*, n.242, 11-17 Oct. 1963, p.8.

²¹ *Novos Rumos*, n.242, 11-17 Oct. 1963, p.1.

²² *Novos Rumos*, n.251, 13-19 Dec. 1963, p.1.

²³ *Novos Rumos*, n.257, 24-30 Jan. 1964, p.3.

²⁴ *Novos Rumos*, n.253, 20-26 Mar. 1963, p.3.

²⁵ In relation to the Progressive Front, see GOMES, 1994; FIGUEIREDO, 1993; FERREIRA, 2010.

²⁶ *Novos Rumos*, n.257, 24-30 Jan. 1964, p.3.

²⁷ *Novos Rumos*, n.257, 24-30 Jan. 1964, p.8.

²⁸ *Novos Rumos*, n.262, 6-12 Mar. 1964, p.3.

²⁹ *Novos Rumos*, n.260, 21-27 Feb. 1964, p.2.

³⁰ *Novos Rumos*, n.260, 21-27 Feb. 1963, p.3.

³¹ The following citations are in *Novos Rumos*, n.264, 20-26 Mar. 1964, p.3.

³² *Novos Rumos*, n.264, 20-26 Mar. 1964, p.8.