

FOREWORD

2014 was marked by academic and political debates about the fiftieth anniversary of the 1964 coup. The “**Coups and Dictatorships**” dossier contained in number 67 presents the contribution of *Revista Brasileira de História* to this process of reflection. Six articles contained in the dossier, five of them focusing on Brazil and Portugal, explore the dimensions of experience of suppression of democracy through force, as well as the forms in which contemporary societies face the challenges raised by historical circumstances.

In “The ‘enemies of the country’: State Repression and Workers’ struggle in the Chemical Workers Trade Union of São Paulo (1964-1979),” Larissa Rosa Corrêa details the impacts of violence on urban workers organized in class associations, taking as a case study one of the largest worker organizations in the country, in a paper which emphasizes the classist dimension of the authoritarianism established in 1964. Bryan Pitts’ provocative article entitled “‘The blood of the youth is flowing’: the Political Class and their children take on the Military in 1968” examines the reactions of Brazilian congressmen to the repression unleashed against the student movement in 1968. Calling attention to the blood relationships between university leaders and professional politicians, Pitts offers new perspectives for the comprehension of the change of nature of the regime following the enactment of AI-5 and for the debate about the relationship between its civilian and military components. In the article “For the ‘pacification of the Brazilian family’: a brief comparison between the amnesties of 1945 and 1979,” Carla Simone Rodeghero provides the reader with a reflection on the similarities and differences between the two periods of ‘democratic transition’ experienced by Brazil. Examining how the concept of the meaning of amnesty was dislocated from mere ‘reconciliation’ to a ‘tool for the winning of rights,’ Rodeghero adds important elements for a debate of renewed relevance.

The cultural dimensions of the search for the construction of legitimacy of dictatorial regimes, as well as the resistance to them, are the focus of the three articles which close the dossier. In “The practice of civism in dictatorships: commemorations and actions in Conselho Federal de Cultura (1966-1975),” Tatyana de Amaral Maia examines one of the principal institutional mechanisms through which the regime exercised its cultural policy, aimed at ‘valorizing the civic elements’ as part of a ‘regeneration’ process of the social and political life of the country. Francisco Régis Lopes Ramos, in “The Calendar and 1964 Military Takeover: temporality, history writing and hagiography,” analyzes the Catholic tradition of association between the recording of the passage of time and the memory of sacrifice of martyrs as part of the resistance to Latin American dictatorships, based on the example of how works of a hagiographic nature linked to Liberation Theology dealt with the life and death of Frei Tito de Alencar Lima. Finally, Edward Castelo Branco reflects on the relationship between the aesthetic experimentalism and political resistance in “PO-EX: The poetic as an event under the night of the Salazarist fascism in Portugal.”

The section of individual articles contains seven papers. Two of them analyze relevant characters in the history of science in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and their ties with Brazil. These are “Darwinian evolutionism? Contributions of Alfred Russel Wallace to the theory of evolution,” by Christian Fausto and Nelson Papavero; and “Diplomacy and science in the context of the World War II: Arthur Compton’s 1941 trip to Brazil,” by Olival Freire Junior and Indianara Silva. The cultural dimension of relations between Brazil and the rest of the world is focused on in the paper by Anaïs Fléchet and Juliette Dumont, entitled “Brazilian cultural diplomacy in the twentieth century.”

The following four papers analyze various themes and objects in social history. Márcia Cury offers an important contribution for the study of social movements in the Southern Cone in “Occupying spaces, constructing identities: the importance of the movement of *pobladores* for the political and social history of Chile (1950-1970).” In “Citizenship by a thread: the black associativism in Rio de Janeiro (1888-1930)” Petrônio Domingues brings new elements for the debate of one of the crucial aspects of the post-emancipation period in Brazil. Paulo Cesar Gonçalves offers a new approach for a classical theme in the history of work in Brazil in “Searching arms for the farming: immigrants and migrants in São Paulo coffee economy in the late nineteenth

century.” The final paper in this section focuses on the question of gender: “Press and women’s education on a pioneer zone: the case of the northwest of São Paulo (1920-1940),” by Raquel Discini de Campos.

This issue brings back the section *Memory*, publishing the lecture “Historical knowledge and social dialogue,” given by the former national president of Anpuh, Benito Bisso Schmidt, at the opening of the XXVII National Symposium of History (July 2013, Natal-RN).

The volume finishes with four reviews. The first of these is related to thematic dossier of this edition: Cláudia Wasserman analyzes the collection *O Passado que não passa: a sombra das ditaduras na Europa do Sul e na América Latina* [The past which does not pass: the shadow of dictatorships in Southern Europe and Latin America], organized by Francisco Palomanes Martinho and Antônio Costa Pinto. Fernando Teixeira da Silva presents Brazilian readers with *Trabalhadores do mundo* [Workers of the World], a translation of the Dutch historian Marcel van der Linden. Finally, we present two reviews dedicated to the works about aspects of Brazilian history recently published in English. Maria Helena P. T. Machado comments on *From Africa to Brazil: Culture, Identity, and an Atlantic Slave Trade, 1600-1830*, by Walter Hawthorne, and Regina Horta Duarte analyzes *In Search of the Amazon: Brazil, the United States, and the Nature of a Region*, by Seth Garfield.

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The “enemies of the country”: State Repression and Workers’ struggle in the Chemical Workers Trade Union of São Paulo (1964-1979)

Os “inimigos da pátria”: repressão e luta dos trabalhadores do Sindicato dos Químicos de São Paulo (1964-1979)

Larissa Rosa Corrêa*

RESUMO

O artigo tem como objetivo analisar o papel do Sindicato dos Químicos de São Paulo e sua relação com a categoria durante o regime civil-militar. Dessa forma, procura-se compreender o impacto do golpe e as mudanças provocadas no movimento sindical após o processo de intervenção estatal. Por meio da análise da trajetória do Químicos, considerado atualmente uma das entidades trabalhistas mais importantes do país, observam-se os mecanismos utilizados pelos governos autoritários para controlar a entidade sindical, bem como a atuação das diretorias conhecidas como “pelegas” e o movimento de luta e de resistência dos trabalhadores para reocupar a entidade.

Palavras-chave: movimento sindical; trabalhadores químicos; Ditadura civil-militar.

ABSTRACT

The article aims to analyze the role of the Chemical Workers Trade Union of São Paulo and its relations with the rank-and-file during the Civil-Military Dictatorship. It seeks to understand the impact of the coup d'état in 1964 as well as the changes in the labour movement. The trajectory of the Chemical Workers Trade Union, which is considered one of the most important in the country, enables an investigation of the strategies used by the authoritarian regime to control labour organizations. It also allows an examination of the role of trade unionists called “pelegos”, as well as the workers’ struggle to resist and to reclaim the trade union again.

Keywords: labour movement; chemical workers; Civil-Military dictatorship.

Founded in 1933, in the course of the 1950s and early 1960s the Chemical Workers Union of São Paulo became one of the principal labor organizations in the city. During this period that was characterized by the powerful rise of

* Post-Doctoral Fellow at the Universidade Federal Rural do Rio de Janeiro (UFRRJ), Department of History, Faperj grant. larissarosacorrea@hotmail.com.

the trade union movement in Brazilian national politics, this Union came under the leadership of communist and nationalist militants. Under the slogan “the snake will smoke” (“*a cobra vai fumar*”) used by the *pracinhas* – soldiers in the Brazilian Expeditionary Force that fought in World War II – the Union won important victories. Their main achievements included a considerable increase in the number of unionized workers and the implementation of hundreds of recreational and educational activities, as well as the organization of campaigns to increase salaries, strikes, and protests. Many of these actions took place under the command of Adelço de Almeida, at that time one of the first black men elected president of a union in the city of São Paulo.¹

At the height of the intense and growing mobilization of the trade union movement during the presidential administration of João Goulart (1961-1964), the Chemical Workers’ Union was constantly monitored by the São Paulo political police (Deops), which considered the union a “center of communist activities.” The demobilization of this trade, however, came soon after the civilian-military coup of 1964.² With Marshall Castello Branco as President of the Republic (1964-1967) and the rise to power of conservative civilians, a veritable hunt began to root out Goulart’s supporters. Many labor organizers, attorneys for the movement, and workers linked to left-leaning organizations were arrested, others fled to wait for better days. This set in motion a long period, which extended over the next two decades, marked by police repression and exploitation of the working classes.

Despite the fact that the labor movement was the target of public policy characterized by the repression and systematic control throughout the entire period of the dictatorship, we know little about the interventions carried out in the main trade unions throughout Brazil, a process that began immediately after the fall of João Goulart. In retracing the trajectory of the Chemical Workers’ Union of São Paulo as a case study, this article seeks to contribute to our broader understanding of the relationship between the workers’ movement and the civilian-military dictatorship. Among other questions, this article will analyze both the reaction of union leaders to the coup in 1964 and the repressive mechanisms that the state used to control the chemical workers’ organization and demobilize workers in the trade, while emphasizing the role of workers involved in the armed struggle, as was the case for the chemical worker Virgílio Gomes da Silva. Furthermore, this article observes the role of unions’ pro-government boards of directors known as “*pelegas*,” as well as the struggle and resistance movement to recover the leadership of the labor organization by forming the Chemical Workers’ Union Opposition.

The questions that this article addresses are based in the analytical repertoire of the “Dictatorship and Repression of Workers and the Labor Movement” Working Group of the National Truth Commission (CNV). This group, established in April of 2013 and not coincidentally the last one to be constituted by the CNV, has the support of all of the major trade union organizations in Brazil, as well as the São Paulo State Truth Commission—Rubens Paiva. This article thus not only draws on questions raised by the Working Group but also aims to contribute some answers to these questions.³

The fact that the “Dictatorship and Repression of Workers and the Labor Movement” was the last Working Group to be organized and was approved only after the main unions applied strong pressure shows how little attention recent studies of the civilian-military dictatorship have paid to the workers’ movement. Even today, the scholarship on this period is dominated by studies of memory and the history of the student movement, the actions of the armed struggle, the economic changes and in social and military policy, or communism, among other themes.⁴ Likewise, there is a conspicuous absence of published works on the activities of the trade union movement after the coup, above all related to the events of 1964 and 1977.⁵ Such a statement can be explained, in part, by the fact that in the early 1980s many researchers were attracted by the great working-class mobilizations emerging in the waning years of the military-civilian regime.⁶ Furthermore, most studies carried out in the late 1970s and 1980s dedicated to analyzing the trade union movement during the dictatorship emphasized state control and manipulation/ cooptation of workers (Troyano, 1978; Costa, 1986). One can thus observe the dearth of studies dedicated to understanding the role of union leaders, including the so-called *pelegos*, by way of their relationships with workers.

THE IMPACT OF THE COUP ON THE TRADE UNION MOVEMENT

After the outbreak of the coup, the entire leadership of the Chemical Workers’ Union was forced out of their positions, as were the leaders of the Chemical Workers’ Federation of São Paulo (Federação dos Trabalhadores Químicos de São Paulo). Floriano Dezem and Adelço de Almeida, both militants of the Brazilian Communist Party (PCB), like their colleagues in the leadership of the Union, were sought out by the police.⁷ Just days after the coup, a police investigation was set up by the Military Tribunal to investigate the supposedly “subversive acts” committed by the unionists in the chemical trade. Among those being charged were: Fidelcino Queiróz dos Santos, Gabriel

Alves Viana, José Ferreira da Silva, Virgílio Gomes da Silva, Floriano Dezem, Adelço de Almeida, and Manoel Mantonhani. Most of these defendants were just past forty years of age, and Virgílio, at 32 years old, was the youngest.⁸

In the police investigation, the Chemical Workers' Union was described as a "real communist cell acting by all possible means and at full force for to disseminate its idea to the São Paulo working class, in a conspiracy against the Constitution, for the overthrow of the government and for its takeover by the supporters of Moscow and Peking." Chemical worker militants were accused of involvement in the project aimed at implanting a so-called "Unionist Republic" in Brazil. The leadership, considered "enemies of the nation," were accused of having opened the doors of the union to "persons who were good friends in whom they absolutely trusted" whom the workers themselves would not have known, but who were linked with the Brazilian Communist Party. The objective, the political police alleged, was to make the workers' organization into an instrument of the Communist Party to exercise an "inglorious conspiratorial task, with the aim of handing the country over to the dominion of a foreign power, whose politics are an attack against individual liberties and exploit and enslaves people."

The investigation carried out in the headquarters of the Union would have uncovered an "abundance of proof" that the leadership, classified as "highly dangerous elements to the social order," would have acted in the service of communist interests. In a highly dramatic tone, the police inquest accused the union leadership of embezzling workers' contributions and applying these funds to "subversive acts." According to the investigators who made this report, the union leaders, in acting as if they were veritable "owners" of the union, manipulated "workers' money, which they had earned through their sweat, blood, sacrifice and tears, although in an honest and decent way." For the political police, the material apprehended in the organization's headquarters and the oversight carried out by the Regional Police Precinct for Workers of São Paulo (Delegacia Regional do Trabalho de São Paulo, DRT) proved these accusations. All of the union leaders accused in the investigation were placed under preventative detention.

With the union leadership forced out of their positions, the old, known "*pelegos*" of the chemical workers returned. Reynaldo dos Santos and Luiz Gonzaga Braga, *interventores* – employees designated by the federal government to intervene in the union – in 1947, assumed control of the Chemical Workers' Union. They accused the deposed leadership of having committed the crimes of bad administration, corruption, and negligence that caused the

physical infrastructure of the union property to become dilapidated. They alleged, more specifically, that the leadership had stolen approximately nine million *cruzeiros*. A part of this amount, they complained, had been spent on activities judged “foreign to union activities,” such as payments for trips abroad taken by union leaders, particularly to Moscow, and the printing of pamphlets and flyers. According to the *interventores*, the flight of members of the deposed leadership and of other important groups of chemical workers’ leaders was the strongest proof that these people had been involved in illicit acts.⁹ The *interventores* also sought to convince the few members present in an assembly that took place in October of 1964 of the supposed gravity of the union’s financial situation. On that occasion, the *interventor* Luiz Gonzaga Braga asked workers for a 5% increase in their contributions to the union, which would be received in the first month of a collective agreement in order to help create equilibrium the organizations accounts. According to the records from this meeting, the workers who were present “came out plainly in favor of the proposal that was presented.”¹⁰

The leadership of the Plastic Workers Union, an organization that had separated from the Chemical Workers’ Union in the 1950s, also suffered from repression.¹¹ The union’s president, Miguel Pereira Lima, had to leave the country in 194, having been arrested five years later.¹² The *interventor* of the Ministry of Labor, José Augusto Júnior, entered in his place. The new president had already been a member of the union leadership as secretary in the 1950s. In the first gathering of the plastic workers after the coup on November 8, 1964, the *interventor* warned the 117 members that were present that he would not tolerate any subject other than the order of the day. From that moment on, it was prohibited to speak of religion, political ideology, and, above all, workers were not allowed to “attack the constituted powers.”¹³

Likewise, the collective agreements debated in the Chemical Workers’ Union after the intervention came to be carried out with the bosses behind closed doors. The assemblies emptied out, and members sought the union only to request specific assistance. Yet the *interventores*’ tenure was not without resistance from the trade, and they encountered difficulties in their endeavors to gain workers’ trust. Workers pressured the new board to negotiate with management. Two months after the coup, the Brazilian Communist Party attempted to reorganize themselves and to understand the “error” that their own leadership had supposedly committed. In a document apprehended by the political police (Deops), the Party registered that that the working classes had

repudiated the coup and that the May Day celebrations had been a “true failure and an evident manifestation of the rejection of the current government.”¹⁴

A little while later, in September 1964, it was suspected that Manoel Mantonhani, the former director of the Chemical Workers’ Union who had been identified as a “a fully active communist,” would be putting together a slate to run in the elections in the Union. For the political police, the communists were exercising their activities in a subterranean form. Mantonhani, like other militants in the Party, would have been observed distributing manifestos that were clandestinely passed from one person’s hands to the next. The pamphlets would have been in circulation in the bathrooms and entryways of factories and on the sidewalks in front of union headquarters. There were complaints that he also had been mounting a campaign against the Castelo Branco government.¹⁵ These small yet courageous actions, such as the circulation of pamphlets, clandestine meetings, participation in May Day demonstrations, and attempts to reoccupy the unions indicate that many workers sought to understand the new historical conjuncture, to find the mean to reorganized, and to get around the repression installed soon after the coup.

The persecution of the leaders and militants of the trade union movement brought many to choose to flee. In March 1965, the assistant chief (*delegado-adjunto*) of the political policing unit (Deops), Adipe Abmussi, requested the preventative detention of eight leaders of the Chemical Workers’ Union: Adelço de Almeida, taken as a fugitive, Floriano Dezen, José Ferreira da Silva, Gabriel Alves Viana, Antônio Pereira da Mata, Júlio Ávila, Fidelcino Queiróz dos Santos e Manoel Mantonhani.¹⁶

The president forced out of the Union, Adelço de Almeida, remained underground between 1964-1967. During this period, he later described how he participated in the PCB dissidence under the leadership of Carlos Marighella. Yet he stated that he did not participate in the armed struggle, alleging that at that time he was rather well known, both within the movement and outside it, in addition to disagreeing with the various “fissures” occurring in left organizations. For Almeida, his entrance in the armed struggle would have exposed the group, since, if “he were to fall,” he argued, “lot of other people would fall, too.” In addition, he had managed to go three years without having been arrested, he added. Having made this decision, Almeida began to seek work, but he was not able to find a job in a factory. He found other means of making a living, however, selling books, for example, with the publisher Editora Brasiliense, which had been founded by Caio Prado Junior.¹⁷

Other trade unionists also went through enormous difficulty to find new work. When Antônio Pereira da Mata, leader of the Chemical Workers, tried to get his old job back at the Nitro Química company, management rejected him. He did manage, however, to negotiate an indemnity for having been fired and received his benefits and even received a letter of recommendation. In his view, this outcome was only possible thanks to his trajectory as a laborer, and to his being known as a “good worker.”¹⁸

THE RETURN OF UNION ELECTIONS

Like most labor organizations that went through a government intervention, voting to choose a new board for the Chemical Workers’ Union, after the Castello Branco government permitted the return of union elections, but this did not happen without tensions and internal disputes. Scheduled to occur in September 1965, two electoral slates were made up. The blue slate was headed by Antônio Cyprian da Silva and Reynaldo dos Santos (then the interventor). The green slate, by contrast, contained names that were then still unknown in the union movement. They had been recruited by members of the board who had been forced out of power. The objective was to seek out names of people who were not registered by the police, thus composing an opposition slate to that of the interventors.

Waldomiro Macedo, a worker in the Nitro Química plant, was one of these yet-unknown names. According to his testimony, he was recruited by militants of the PCB in his place of work. The meetings, assisted by the Party, were carried out clandestinely and in different locations, in order to get around repression.¹⁹ To the distaste of the authorities at the Ministry of Labor and those in favor of maintaining the state interventors in power, the green slate won the election. For Macedo, who assumed the position of treasurer of the organization, his slate’s electoral victory had been possible thanks to workers’ strong rejection of state intervention in the union.²⁰

For instance, Macedo narrated what transpired in the Legal Department of the Union during the administration of the state interventors. According to him, in that period when a worker approached the headquarters of the organization to initiate proceedings to redress a labor dispute, the lawyers posed numerous questions – in such a way as to make it difficult for the complainant to carry the case forward – in stark contrast with the era in which the organization was led by militants of the communist party. At the beginning of the 1960s, Macedo explained, under the old leadership “the worker arrived and

proceedings were initiated right away. The company would fire someone, and they thought up a story right away and came out swinging.” But, from the workers’ perspective, the new leaders were far less willing to fight for workers’ rights. Macedo continues, “The interventores did a kind of triage. The workers said that [these new leaders] were on the other side.”

For the Deops investigators, the victorious electoral slate represented a threat to the “order” established by the military. It was not only Deops who feared that the communist and nationalist leaders would return to the unions. In the early years of the Castello Branco administration, observers and supporters of the regime, including some labor attachés and labor organizations from the United States, in addition to the Ministry of Labor, expressed concern about distancing themselves from these more radical labor leaders. Thus, such organizations as the American Institute for the Development of Free Unionism (Iadesil) and the Cultural Labor Institute (ICT) invested heavily in the training of new leaders who would be committed to supporting the new government and who valued what they called “free unionism,” a model promoted by trade unionism in the US during the Cold War (Corrêa, 2013). Nonetheless, although at that moment Waldomiro Macedo represented the danger that militant communists might return to the leadership of the union, he remained as the head of the organization for most of the period of the dictatorship, pacifying management and the state and keeping chemical workers away from the organization.

In a Deops document dated from August 19, 1964 based on reports from unidentified “collaborators”, police registered the actions of “elements directly linked to the Communist Party” in the factories of the city of São Paulo and the surrounding, working-class suburban area known as the “ABC.” In the Trol S/S toy factory located in Vila Anchieta, communist militants were seen having conversations with workers. The objective, this document asserted, was “to determine who the innocent individuals were of whom they could take advantage.” In another factory, also in the plastics industry, located in the Santo Amaro neighborhood in the South Zone of the city of São Paulo, an informant denounced the actions of three militants. These three individuals, the source emphasized, “were so active that they were worth ten.” They were: Adão José da Silva, Benedito Apolônio Fonseca, and Anísio Volpe. The first of these was said to have attended secret meetings of the Party and to have been responsible for transmitting information to the other two. Proof of these supposed “subversive acts,” the police reported, could be found in the hands of

the interventor of the Union, who had taken a photograph of the documents and provided the negatives to the informant.²¹

In the company Atma Paulista, located in the Lapa neighborhood in the West Zone of São Paulo, Deops investigators were notified that the militants Raimundo Coelho dos Santos, João Ferreira das Neves, and Osmar Miguel de Souza, promoted “communist agitation” in the factories of the chemical and plastics sector, under the command of the director of the deposed Plastics Union, Miguel Pereira Lima. Lima was accused of preaching at the union meetings “whatever the Party ordered him to.” According to the accusations, the leader had been a fugitive since April 1, the last day of the coup. He had made contact with his family several times, according to what his accuser claimed to have overheard in a conversation between the accused and his wife. Lima’s wife had been instructed to say that her husband had been arrested, to avoid having people trying to find him.

Deops also registered the accusation that the worker Paulo Benicio de Oliveira was determined to “catechize” the employees of Indústrias Reunidas Balila, located in the neighborhood called Brooklin in the south zone of São Paulo. According to this denunciation, which clearly appears to have been made by an employee of the union, an “agitator” needed to have a “lesson in morality,” as the “collaborator” explained to the police:

[Paulo Benicio de Oliveira] is from the extreme left, and when interrogated he tries to claim that he is from the right, but in reality he’s from the left. He wants to do away with the Union interventor and with me as well, and he’s taking action to remove us from here and in the next elections to enter into the union leadership himself. He intends, once his is here, to invite the reds here again for each of them to take back their positions.²²

The collaboration between agents of Deops and interventors/employees of the unions appear to have been quite advantages for all parties. On the one hand, the investigators had access and control of the unionists’, militants’, and workers’ movements. On the other hand, interventors sought to preserve their recently achieved positions in the organizations, making use of such strategies as denunciations to prevent the return of the former leaders. This climate of denunciations powerfully contributed to the spread of unease and mutual distrust between the workers and rank and file militants within the factories, who feared the political persecution and the loss of their jobs.