

Preface

Leôncio Basbaum, reviewing the years that followed the Communist-inspired uprisings of 1935 in Brazil, wrote in 1962 that “the reaction that was unleashed has no parallel in our history, not even in the appalling times of the state of siege of Artur Bernardes. It was a period of black terror that lasted until 1941, during which the police savagery respected neither social nor political position, neither age nor sex.”¹ Following the dismantlement of the Communist Party of Brazil (PCB) in Rio de Janeiro in 1940 and in São Paulo in 1941, the repression continued severe for three more years and the nation’s press continued to be censored.

In an effort to recount episodes which involved the PCB and Brazilian Trotskyism from 1935 to 1945, I have been assisted by the large collection of papers loaned me by Hermínio Sacchetta, who headed the PCB in São Paulo before he became involved in the “Sacchetta schism” of 1937–1938 and organized the Trotskyite Partido Socialista Revolucionário. Other Communist documents are to be found, together with police reports and the declarations of prisoners, in the Brazilian National Archives, and in that connection I am grateful to Daphne F. Rodger for consulting the archives in Rio de Janeiro and Brasília, thus adding to information that I had previously collected. Mention should also be made of the papers in the files of *O Estado de S. Paulo*, in the Centro de Pesquisa e Documentação de História Contemporânea do Brasil (CPDOC) in Rio de Janeiro, and in the Instituto de Filosofia e Ciências Humanas, of the University of Campinas.

Much help was furnished by researcher Pedro Rodrigues, who taught me a great deal about the participation of Brazilians in the Spanish Civil War, and by some victims of the Brazilian repression (and contributors to it), who recalled their experiences when I interviewed them. It was good to have the cooperation of veteran militants, such as Apolônio Pinto de Carvalho, fighter for the Spanish Republic and French Resistance, and Sebastião Francisco, who

headed, at different times, the PCB movements in São Paulo and the city of Rio de Janeiro. João Batista Barreto Leite Filho, distinguished journalist and student of revolutionary theory, furnished invaluable assistance by going over my pages and making innumerable corrections and suggestions. I am deeply grateful also to Virginia Daily for her help, much of it in the form of typing several drafts of the manuscript.

Hermínio Sacchetta pointed out, during one of our conversations, that the passage of decades has dimmed memories; and Eduardo Maffei, preparing his book *A Morte do Sapateiro*, has been struck by serious discrepancies in testimonies. Stanley Hilton, dealing with documents of a different nature but of roughly the same time period, explains in *Hitler's Secret War in South America, 1939-1945* (p. 6) that "there were many instances in which the data were incomplete or inconsistent; in such cases, logic and plausibility were the only guides."

Certainly the judgments which I was forced to make have not resulted in an account whose every detail will satisfy every reader. It is to be hoped, however, that the pages which follow provide a generally correct picture of the Brazilian Communist movement during a phase that was difficult for it. The picture could hardly have been drawn without references to many issues of *A Classe Operária*, *A Luta de Classe*, and their successors of the early 1940's. They reveal the positions assumed by Brazilian Stalinists and Trotskyites in the face of important world events, among them the signing of the Soviet-German Pact of 1939, the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, and the dissolution of the Comintern in 1943.

The Vargas regime, which dominated Brazil during the years covered by this study, came to power with a revolution made in 1930 by dissatisfied political and military groups. The revolution ended the existing constitution and Congress and placed the administrations of the states in the hands of *interventores*, responsible to the new central government.

Getúlio Vargas, who had been an affable, calm, and progressive governor of the southern state of Rio Grande do Sul, showed political skill in handling the disputes between those who had made the 1930 revolution. At the same time, his regime issued decrees that were intended to improve the situation of workers, and it set up arrangements for a network of labor unions in which the newly formed Labor Ministry would have considerable control.

In 1932 the Vargas regime subdued an uprising begun in the once politically powerful state of São Paulo, where the local leaders

feared that Vargas might remain in office indefinitely. Although the Paulistas suffered defeats on the battlefields, their demand for a constitution for Brazil was realized in 1934. But the constitutional assembly chose Vargas to serve as president of Brazil until 1938, and he enjoyed a majority in the Congress elected under the new constitution.

In displaying enmity toward the illegal Communist Party of Brazil, the Vargas regime emulated its predecessors. The enmity was natural because the PCB, born in 1922 as a section of the Comintern, took its orders from Moscow and made it clear from the start that it would like to overturn whatever bourgeois government was in office. As the PCB membership usually varied between several hundred and several thousand, this objective could not be achieved without allies, and the PCB sought them during the intervals when Moscow's policy was not sectarian. Thus in 1927 the PCB's Astrojildo Pereira went to Bolivia to give Communist literature to the exiled Luís Carlos Prestes, young military hero of the opposition to pre-Vargas administrations.

Prestes, in Buenos Aires in 1930, revealed Communist ideas, but by then sectarianism prevailed in Comintern circles and the PCB denounced him as a "petty bourgeois" maker of "barracks coups." Although Prestes himself adopted a Far Left stance, issuing manifestos that attacked his "bourgeois" revolutionary companions of the 1920's, the PCB continued to criticize him in 1931. The Comintern, showing more interest than the PCB in Prestes, took him that year to the Soviet Union. He was working for the Comintern in Moscow in 1934 when he gained admittance to the PCB in absentia.

By late 1934 the Comintern was again in a mood for allies. Hoping to stem the advance of fascism, it adopted a "popular front" policy. As Prestes' revolutionary exploits in the 1920's had gained him a vast following in Brazil, he returned there in 1935, after an absence of eight years, to give impetus to the new Brazilian popular front, the anti-imperialist Aliança Nacional Libertadora, and to seek allies for an armed insurrection against the Vargas regime.