

HISTORICAL CONSTITUTION OF THE BRAZILIAN UNION MOVEMENT

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ABSTRACT: The Republic brings with the new political model, also, an intervention period on the part of the State in the subjects between the dominant class and the subordinate classes, seeking to regulate the relationships between Capital and Work. The regulation of the job market favored not only to the working class, but also, to the dominant class, that road like this the movement striker to flow back. The proletariat obtains several concessions, among them the prohibition of the work for twelve year-old minors, the retirement right to the railway man, the right to the railway man paid vacations and of the ones that they worked with the water supply in the Federal Capital. His function starts to be of builder of the Political School for the worker, turning him/it capable to make his/her emancipation total front to the capital. In our country the union, although legal of the juridical point of view of the bourgeois order, it is denied and illegal in fact, because the repression policeman impedes the free exercise of their manifestations, when the State, acting on behalf of the capital, through the Labor court, she judges illegal some strike type, exercising on the work an authoritarian dominance.

KEYWORDS: Brazilian. Class work. Historical.

In our days, disqualifying the other is becoming a perverse habit, with the sole intension of putting yourself in command. (Wander Amaral Camargo).

INTRODUCTION

This article proposes to make a social and historiographical reconstitution of the Brazilian Union Movement. It brings the first results related to a wider study, which aims to contribute for the discussion which is carried out in the Academy on the importance or not of the Unions as organs of collective standing for the workers of our country.

The big question nowadays, a generator of many conflicts, concerns the centrality or not of the work in cotemporary capitalism. In order to penetrate the discussion mentioned about the Union, retrieving the particular concept that each historic period attributed to the element in discussion is essential, highlighting, by means of this historical recapture, that in

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the couple of periods before capitalism, the act of working used to characterize the inferior classes. Under capitalism, such element takes on a concept which is inversed in relation to the previous ones, therefore revealing that work takes on the concept which is more relevant for the dominant classes of each epoch.

However, the burden of slavery upon the Brazilian ideological and cultural development keeps on attributing a negative connotation on everything related to work and its features. The same belittling connotation is given to the Union, as an original representation of the workers. The article thus approaches the period from the formation of the first anarchic unions up to the beginning of the so-called Military Revolution, in 1964.

The historical meaning of the Unions

The general conditions of a people are related to the way their country was raised, and that is not different for the Brazilian. The degrading life situation of the Brazilian workers is rooted to quite old origins. To visualize that, one may remind oneself of the settlement promoted in a predatory way, firstly depreciating the labor of natives, who were paid with unimportant everyday objects and, later, enslaved, and also of the continuous depreciation of all the workers that came next.

The slavery of African people promoted the feasibility and the economic and merchandise valorization for the Portuguese metropolis, and made up a way for a farming production for the external market.

New consequences of the structural conformation of the international colonialism and of the social situation in Brazil provide the external and internal impositions, in order to bolt the conditions for the first industrial impulse, in the ending of the XVIII Century, and beginning of the XIX. Thus, one can claim that the Brazilian industries developed themselves as an integrated element – along with agriculture – of the process of capital accumulation based on employment. The first employees massively emigrated from Europe, where the Industrial Revolution was much faster than in Brazil.

These first European employees carried a reclaiming political tradition that used to contrast with the callow capitalist culture of the Brazilian entrepreneurs. Grown used to “fair wages and fair shifts”, found in the 1864 Constitution of the International Association of Workers, quite known as the First International, these workers were politically more advanced

than all of our workers together, basically composed by slaves, farm-less farmers and craftsmen.

The above mentioned diversity of ideas and visions of the world will make the behavior of the national workers change, aiming to a new relation of strengths, through a working ideology, in the context of the Brazilian industrial capitalism. That is when the first ideological currents come to life, the most remarkable in the working movement are *anarchism* and *reformism*.

The anarchists acted through a basic principle of denying the State, and their strategy included facing the matters through a direct action, which means, with no institutional go-betweens – such as political parties, for example – unless they belonged to the working class, therefore constituting an unionism ruled by a combative membership. That is where the term *Anarchy Union* comes from. The first general strikes aimed to destroy Capitalism and to practice the system of social self-management.

On the other hand, reformists looked forward to improve the life of workers and used to act in syndicates with apolitical aspirations, implementing actions that fixed the immediate economic achievements as their main concern, consciously forgetting to look for a change in socio-political structure. They also talked about a policy of collaboration between entrepreneurs and workers, known as “Collaborationism”.

In another point, both the currents were similar, that is, in the objective life conditions of the worker. Although the anarchists intended to transform society, they did not show a single feasible alternative to empower the workers, because they denied any way of organization that reached the power of the State, and governed in name of the working class. Thus, they were as “*apolitical*” as the *reformists*.

However, although the Brazilian workers did not have a sharpened political culture, they began to assimilate the purposes and, by means of anarchism, reached the socialist ideas. The *anarchists* had a fundamental role in the constitution and validity of the Brazilian Union Movement.

In 1906, according to Beiguelman (1972), during the first Brazilian Working Congress, the term Union was officially adopted, because, up to that time, the working organizations focused on mutual help. The first strikes, from 1889 to 1920, aimed to fix laws that ruled the working relations by the State.

Republic brings as a new political model, also, a period of intervention played by the State, in the matters that concerned the dominant class and the subordinate classes, looking

forward to regulating the relations between Capital and Work. The country then passes by a very intense inflationary period, a result from loss of control by the State in moderating the emission of money to pay the external debts and a raise in the consumption of industrialized goods.

According to Vianna (1977), not only did the regulation of the labor market favor the working class, but also did it favor the dominant class, which therefore experienced the return of the striking movement. The working class obtains many concessions, among them the prohibition of work for children under the age of twelve, the right to retirement for the railway workers, the right to paid holidays for railway workers and for those who worked with water supplies in the State Capital. The strikes were then permitted, only suppressed when there were constraints, physical violence or public order disturbance.

The dominant class acknowledging the Worker Union opens a way that will make the principle of union association more contradictory. On the one hand, it shows the opposition between Capital and Work, because every action based on the union association, aiming to defend the working class, is a direct combat of it against the money. On the other hand, the acceptance of the syndicate manifests the acceptance of its double, that is, the exploitation of the worker by capitalism.

The syndicate therefore becomes capable of building links, of assuming obligations. Its function changes into being the builder of Political School for the worker, making him capable of effecting his total emancipation before the money. In our country, the union, although legal by the juridical standpoint of the bourgeoisie, is denied and illegalized, because the police repression refrains the free access of its manifestations, when the State, by acting to raise money, through the Labor Courts, judges as illegal any given type of strike, exercising an authoritarian rule over work. Moving among these contradictions, the working class has managed to survive.

The attempts to overcome the visions that were hegemonic in the Brazilian union movement were performed in the ending of the XIX century, but failed because of sheer incompatibility between the *anarchists* and the *social-democrat labor*, with its *reformist* fashion. The socialists try to carry out the first Brazilian Socialist Congress in 1892, and the second Congress in 1902. Both failed because of a boycott against these two union currents that did not accept the ideas of the scientific socialism. The proletariat, fruit of a perverse colonial period, was historically unorganized, because apart from politically facing the dominant classes (rural oligarchy, industrial and commercial bourgeoisie, middle class,

catholic church, armed forces, etc), it also counted with leaderships that were retrograde and with limited and mistaken ideological conceptions.

With no conditions of acting against the political organizations of the dominant class, the workers counted only with their newspapers to claim for their rights and reclaim liberty of association, of press, eight-hour shift, minimum wage, wage equality for equal jobs, etc (VIANNA, 1977).

It is in this period (1889 to 1920) that the most important strikes against the wage diminishing proposed by entrepreneurs of the textile sector come to exist, and they were also against the diminishing of the workday and flogging of the women workers by the foremen of the companies. With the increase of the strikes, the State establishes laws to expel the workers of other countries (1905), trying to frighten the most combative leaderships and therefore diminishing the influence of these workers on the conjunct of the industrial proletariat.

After having failed the previous Congresses, in 1906 the 1st Brazilian Working Congress is carried out, with the objective of requiring higher wages and the diminishing of unemployment. As an alternative for general unemployment due to inflation, the congressmen propose the diminishing of the workday, therefore generating more work offers and refraining the professional debasement and the lowering wage. Following the approved ruling,

[...] that would permit them to rest, what makes a series of things easier, like studying, associative education, the intellectual emancipation and combat against alcoholism, along with the excess of exhausting and stultifying work, favoring the creation of libraries and teaching and union activity institutions, apart from fighting against the war and the conservation of May 1st as a formal date, against governmental intervention, which wanted to make it a party holiday, denying its internationalist character.(LINHARES, 1977, p.35).

In 1908, the COB (Brazilian Working Confederation) is organized, which, in 1913, makes its 2nd National Meeting, centering its ruling on the fight against the expelling of strangers that is made official by the Congress, against the governmental maneuvers in promoting official congresses and in the complaint against the war.

The world war of the imperialist powers increases even more recession phenomenon in a country, obliging the government to emit more money to overcome the deficits of agriculture and industry. Because of that, unemployment rises, because recession causes companies to go bankrupt, and the easiest way out found by the dominant class to compensate the decrease in profits is to reduce the wages and the workday in most of the São Paulo

industries. The crises of monopolist capitalism bring chaos to the relations between the city and the rural area. For the city unemployed people, the most tempting way out is in the agricultural frontiers, and there they move in groups of millions, trying to survive. But the agrarian structure, allied to the delay conditions, as in the work relations, as in the appropriation by the countryside men, make the life of workers much too heavy. Then, the strikes for better work conditions happen, and even if the rural workers had the right to form associations (law 979 of 1903) that the urban workers would only gain years later, the repression against them used to be quite atrocious.

The model of development adopted by the State to benefit the dominant class highlights the resistance moved by the working class, that reclaims changes in the labor laws. The international happenings, mainly the Soviet Revolution, tells the most combative leaderships that the syndical movement could not be divided between the *reformist and anarchist* conceptions. The promoted rallies and the manifestations occurred in the strikes open way to a future formation of the Brazilian Communist Party. It is in that context that Brazil signs, in 1919, the Treaty of Versailles, where it compromises to fulfill certain international determinations in favor of labor regulations.

The strikes carried out by the *anarchists* are repressed, more and more violently, and in the III Congress of COB in 1920, a new setting for the syndicates is defined, that previously did not have territorial basis in the works, and now associate with industries. But

[...] the different thing about the political juncture, then still opening, was the kind of combat used against anarchism. [...] What happened was the maturation of a set of alliances that brought together sectors of the political and intellectual elite with the police and the patronage, with the frank support of the Catholic Church. That composition, which mixed solid material and ideological resources, translated into, for example, the reinvigoration of nationalist movements, that, at that time, had a clear militant and clerical character [...] that chose as an enemy the anarchists: strangers and atheists. (GOMES, 1988, p.139-140).

With the formation, in 03/23/1922 of the Brazilian Communist Party, the strike movement takes on a whole new identity, but the intense crises in the country make the dominant class support the state of siege implanted by Washington Luís. A few months later, the Communist Party is declared illegal.

The communist had to conquer their place among the workers, fighting for space and stimulating divisions in the union organization. Their first achievements were only reached in the second half of the decade, when the

political juncture itself suffered substantial alterations due to the defeasance of the state of siege. (GOMES, 1988, p. 140).

Political and economic instability of the country worsens more and more the situation of the working class and make the industrial bourgeoisie take on a role command in the national political scene. The twenties brought turbulence to the lives of the Brazilians and provoked many rebellions, for example: the Forte de Copacabana rebellion (1922), the lieutenant's upheaval (1924), the Column of Hope (1926), the formation of BOC (Countryside Worker Block) in 1926, and the Liberal Alliance (1928), were the most significant.

Also, many changes happened in the union movement,

[...] the Parliament accelerates the legislation of working subjects (in 1922, it creates the rural courts in São Paulo, and in 1927 the first profile of the working rights in Brazil was already established), making it answer to old general wishes of the workers and, at the same time, increase its forms of controlling the class that is struck the most by the crises registered (AUGUSTA, 1978, p.8).

The working laws that became effective help the *reformists* and now increase their influence on the union movement, therefore endorsing their cooperation proposals to the bourgeois state. Although these limitations exist, the rural and urban union movement continued going after alternatives to question capitalism. The creation of the General Confederation of Labor (CGT) in April 1929 represents one more step in defending the interests of the Brazilian workers, considering that in the same year, in Montevideo, the Latin American Congress of Workers is carried out.

With the elections time coming closer in 1930, the BOC tries to dispute for a place in the political scenario of the country, but there was no room for the proletariat. The succession of Washington Luís shows contours for the oligarchies from São Paulo that used to impose their interests in detriment of those of other elites. The choice for Júlio Prestes as a candidate for the Presidency did not please the mineiros (people born in the State of Minas Gerais) and broke the rules of the game. Washington Luís believed that he was able to neutralize possible dissidences, especially in Minas Gerais; he also thought he had the support of Rio Grande do Sul and, that way, he could isolate the mineiros.

Actually, the opposite happened: Antônio Carlos – the president of Minas – initiated links with the opposition, for the launching of a candidacy for the Federal Government, but that did not represent a rupture between Minas and the Federal Government.

After many conversations and reticences, in June 1929, Minas Gerais and Rio Grande do Sul laid the launching of Getúlio Vargas' candidacy. They obtained the support of Paraíba, to whom they offered the vice presidency. [...] The Liberal Alliance was constituted as a regional front, embracing the majority of the political representatives of Rio Grande do Sul and Minas Gerais, to whom the Democrat Party of São Paulo came to join. [...] The program of the Liberal Alliance reflected the aspirations of the regional dominant classes which were not associated to the coffee core and had, as an objective, the awareness of the middle class (FAUSTO, 1978, p.418, our translation).

The deposition by weapons of Washington Luís, by the military commanded by General Mena Barreto in October 24th, 1930, marks what came to be known as the “1930 Revolution”. The “revolutionary” who came from the South and the urban middle class manifestations in the Federal District guarantee the occupation of Getúlio Vargas in November 3rd, 1930. The *coup d'état* required by Getúlio Vargas prevents workers of having direct standing.

In the changes verified after the movement of 1930, the rural oligarchy sponsors modernizing reforms, keeping the traditional forms of social control. Within that modernizing perspective, the industry reaches its decisive impulse, at the same time, the field, despite the modernizing forms of production, and maintains its retrograde relations for the worker. Concerning the urban worker, the State canalizes its combativeness to the inside of the state apparatus, under the corporatist form (AUGUSTA, 1978, p.9, our translation).

The next step of the dictatorial State was the creation of the Ministry of Labor in 11/26/1930, by means of the decree 19433/30, as a way of holding the Union Movement and promoting the reformists to the leading of the Union Cooperation.

One should note that the Brazilian working class, at this time, goes through defining transformations also in its charts: The number of foreign militants is decreased – by means of governmental actions such as the decree 19770, from 03/17/1931, which limits foreign participation – and the number of workers coming from the fields is increased with the exodus that succeeds the alterations in rural production (AUGUSTA, 1978, p.9, our translation).

The following act is the formation of employers' associations, which have as a goal the organization of employers, so that their bargaining strength is raised before the State. Now

[...] allied to the numerous working laws decreed by between 1930 and 1934 (around 47 decrees, among those of vacation, professional ID card creation, ordination of the workday, woman work, and under-age work, retirement, pension, etc.), the business community is able to impose that the salary issue is of exclusive responsibility of the State, thus becoming totally free of the direct pressure of the workers' (AUGUSTA, 1978, p.9, our translation).

The years that followed were marked by an intense political agitation, some of the happenings of that time were: the São Paulo Constitutional Revolution in 1932, defeated by the Federal Government; the nomination of Gustavo Capanema for Federal intervener of Minas Gerais in 1933; the nomination of Capanema for Health and Education Minister in 1934, with Drummond de Andrade as the Council Chief; the attempt of coup commanded by the communists, persecution and arrest of many writers and intellectuals in 1935.

The rearticulation of the oligarchies, with a higher participation of that from São Paulo, endangered the conservative claims of the dominant groups and of Getúlio Vargas himself, who, together, maneuver a new *coup d'état*. The appearance of the National Liberation Alliance (in Portuguese: ANL - Aliança Nacional Libertadora), coordinated by the Communist Party and under the command of the Lieutenant Luís Carlos Prestes, with a program that attended workers, sectors of the burgeoning middle class, low-level officials and Army veterans, makes Getúlio Vargas ask the Congress for the approval of the National Security Law.

The labor movement is the first to feel the truculence of the president. Getúlio

[...] responds to the mobilizations and to the pressure of the employers, with the creation of special polices and also of the Department of Social and Political Order (in Portuguese: DOPS - Departamento de Ordem Política e Social), in the meantime he decrees the shutdown of the CGT (in Portuguese: Confederação Geral do Trabalho) and ANL (AUGUSTA, 1978, p.10, our translation).

Meanwhile, the 1934 Constitution starts to be gradually overcome by exception artifices. Vargas' dictatorial power increases, with the shutdown of free unions and the arrest of unionists, workers and other objectors, including the deposition of the mayor of the Federal District.

The *fascist* corporatism is slowly being forged with the support of the frightened bourgeoisie and with the increase in the number of strikes and labor uprisings. Getúlio Vargas intelligently works in order to keep himself in charge, sometimes supporting Plínio Salgado, and others, José Américo de Almeida, in his political pretensions of succeeding him. In the

meantime, he gives workers a working legislation that pleases both the bourgeoisie and the middle class.

You have a legislation which was granted to you with no demand, imposition or pressure of any order, but spontaneously. That is exactly what constitutes the predominant trace that puts us, in terms of social legislation, above all other countries. What is called 'labor conditions' was never obtained in any country, as they are here verified. In Brazil, there are no claims concerning that subject. There are concessions. Governmental concessions to the efficient employees, who are physical, or intellectual workers. (GETÚLIO VARGAS apud BOITO JUNIOR, 1991, p.74-75, our translation).

The populism now starts being sketched by Getúlio as a strategy to please the working class. The intensification of the conflicts between the fascist and integralist extreme right, and the left, represented by the ANL, is capitalized by Vargas to propose to the Congress the approval of the Stage of Siege. The Congress retreats fearing the growing personal power of Vargas. That is just what Getúlio wanted: to put his allies in conspiracies with the state leaderships. It is then established a growing state of terror.

Getúlio, with the help of Generals Dutra and Góes Monteiro, dissolves, in 1937, the Congress and deploys the dictatorship of the New State,

[...] withdrawing some loyalist generals from the charge of strategic regions, as the South of the country, while Francisco Campos, from Minas Gerais, a supporter of Fascism, was writing a new Constitution, which was examined and secretly approved by elements of the dominant group, or linked to it, such as the governor of Minas, Benedito Valadares, the integralist Plínio Salgado and the general Góes Monteiro. The coup was supported by the majority of the state governors and by great part of the Army Commanders (ALENCAR, 1979, p.258-259, our translation).

The Constitution was not created by the people, but by a jurist with fascist and authoritarian tendencies - Francisco Campos, who was inspired in the Polish corporatism, from the *fascist* Poland. The **New State** represents the introduction of the **Fascist Dictatorship** in the country. The programmatic basis of the new regime was basically the same of Mussolini in Italy, that is:

[...] nationalism, attack to the political class, to liberalism, republicanism, anticlericalism and aspirations of social renewal, embodying, thus, the positions of a small and restless bourgeoisie (TRENTO, 1993, p.16, our translation).

The New State had its ideological root on the wishes of the middle class Lieutenant of the Communist Party, on the political concepts of the fascist integralism and on the interests of the bourgeoisie' oligarchy. The absence of a single party, formally constituted, as the Italian mold, is supplied by the **State-Party** of President Vargas. A strong, integral, authoritarian and corporatist.

Werneck Vianna suggests that Corporatism in Brazil has its singularities. Its responsibilities, besides controlling the subaltern classes, should be that of booking the economy, due to the almost inexistence of the great capital in the Brazilian historical process (differently from that of Europe) implanting steel companies, railway systems, oil (TOTA, 1994, p.31, our translation).

In this sense, the New State was the implementer of an intervention policy in economy, in unions and in people's freedom. "That State came out of nothing, but it claimed its continuity with the State of the XIX Century and, later, with the Portuguese State" (PÉCAULT, 1990, p.74, our translation).

Getúlio Vargas was a rancher with a sharp political view, because at the same time he fought the Americanist liberalism, found in the political Brazilian life since the 1891 Constitution, he would adopt his principles to the progress of the Nation.

There is, evidently, in all of this, a great mistake, a big illusion that disturbs the exact view of the national realities to all these decentrists and autonomists, who are, eventually, all the spirits that boast of liberalists and foreheads here. Because it is necessary to remember, [...] that Freedom and Democracy are not the only goods in the world; that there are many other causes worthy being defended in politics, besides Freedom – however are the Civilization and the Nationality, and that in many times, there happens that a government which is not liberalist and democratic may be, though, much more favorable to the progress of a people in the direction of those objectives. A systematic decentralization regime, with an escape to the center discipline, localism or preponderant provincialism, instead of being an agent of strength and progress, may be a weakness and annihilation factor and, instead of assuring freedom and democracy, may really result in the death of both.' (VIANNA, 1930, p. 97 apud PAIM, 1989, p.4, our translation)

That instrumental authoritarianism in Vargas may be seen as a chameleonic game in which the conquest and maintenance of the political power explains itself. The castilhist nature of Vargas imposes a modernizing dimension to the State while, at the same time, the labor ideology, or corporatism, put itself as an alternative to the representative republican system.

The corporatist model definitely implanted with the New State had very contradictory aspects: if, on the one hand, the business community accepted the legislation in what concerned the intervention in the autonomous association life, they would not accept it as corporatist because it prohibited the participation of the working class; to prove this, there were the business communities resistances in accepting most of the working laws decreed in the period from 1935 to 1945: 32 laws, among them: Consolidation of Working Laws (in Portuguese: CLT – Consolidação das Leis de Trabalho) in 06/01/1943; indemnity for dispense and stability, in 06/05/1933; institution of the minimum wage, in 05/01/1940. There is no report from this period of legal providence concerning the rural worker) (AUGUSTA, 1978, p.10, our translation).

The institution of collective working contracts arose at that same period, and the State as the representative of the dominant class becomes arbitrary, by claiming that the unionist and association freedom would affect only those who are recognized by that very State. The bargaining will be valid only if they are countersigned by the Labor Court, even if it preaches the negotiation between capital and work.

The New State will only create a specific legislation for the union in 1939, by means of the decree 1402/39, in which the mass unionization of workers to official unions is supported by the Vargas Government. It also contributes with the institutionalization of the Association Tax, by the decree 2377 from 07/08/1940, and specifies that only official unions can receive funds. These funds come from the workers themselves, associated or not, and are compulsorily discounted in their payroll. Thus, the official unions guarantee social support to the workers instead of the State, which begins to manage these funds at the Ministry of Labor, passing them on later.

With the end of the New State in 1945, a new bourgeois democracy period starts. The New Constitution, voted in 1946, however, keeps untouched all the working legislation of the New State. It

[...] served as a lesson for the workers, at the same time it destroyed the illusions of the former Constituent propagandists, [...] The happenings demonstrated, with total evidence, that the convocation of a Constituent Assembly only represents possibilities of transformation of the basis of a political regime if the working class is able to impose its interests (AUGUSTA, 1978, p.11, our translation).

Unfortunately, the workers did not have conditions of interfering in the elaboration of the 1946 Constitution in its most relevant aspects, which were the union autonomy, the right for strikes and the ideological certificate for the association of the worker.

The Government Dutra, by coming to an end, leaves the spine of the Vargas corporatism intact. Thus, the election of Getúlio Vargas, from PTB, to the presidency of the Republic further intensifies more the contradictions of the Brazilian proletariat. Known at that time as the “Father of the Poor”, Getúlio sees an opportunity in this confluence of factors to deepen even more the nationalist development, in which the emphasis starts to be the industrialization of essential sectors to the great capital, that is, investments in basic sectors, as steel, oil and electrical energy companies, etc. He intends to amplify the infrastructure network, such as roads, increase electrification and, mainly, the regulation of economy, as a safe way of assuring the financial development conditions.

The Vargas nationalism consisted in keeping the most strategic sectors of the economy as responsibility of the State and of the private Brazilian capital, and the international capital in charge of areas considered non-priority. But the main political instrument of the New State of Getúlio was the mass policy. By means of the state control in the associations and in PTB, Getúlio aptly matches the interests of the dominant class with those of the working class.

The mass politics exerted a double effect over the working class: at one side, as it was directed by the union scabs and by populist leaders linked to the dominant groups and to the State, it limited the political action and the ideological horizons of the working class; at the other, it led to conquests of popular interest and, by means of strikes and nationalist manifestations, it allowed a better organization of the working class (ALENCAR et al, 1979, p.293, our translation).

The number of strikes during the Vargas government is considerably higher in the first couple of years, because the increase in the cost of living, the growing concentration of income in the hand of few, and a high inflation with low salaries, now increases the poverty among the workers. The main claims are the following:

[...] wage increase debts payment, work conditions improvement, Christmas compensation payment (commanded by the bank managers of São Paulo), against famine, against the value of the minimum wage, for the nationalization of foreign companies, union liberty, against the 9070 decree (anti-strike), against the violent acts carried by a few company owners (AUGUSTA, 1978, p.11, our translation).

The following years of Vargas’ government are politically busy for the working class, because the governmental intervention on the unions finally starts to decrease, and the workers could elect their Union representatives, who came from commissions of companies, proposed by the Communist Party, what, at that time, represented a victory.

With the death of Getúlio Vargas (24/08/1954), the union movement, linked to corporatism, meets, as a way of manifestation, the strikes against the cost of living in cities and the extension of the labor laws benefits to the field. The Brazilian Communist Party, even though living in illegality, has a strong acting on the conduction of the “no war” Union movement. One of its objectives

[...] remains to be effecting the union unity in a top organ for public strength representation. However, that objective overlooked a previous need: the existence of a significant number of union workers. On the contrary, the percentage of union workers in each category made and continues to make up to 25 % of associates in each sector in the country, which means a vital weakness for the emancipation of the worker, if we consider that the only social strength the working class has to fight the capital (as in money) is their number and unity (AUGUSTA, 1978, p.12-13, our translation).

The governments that came after Getúlio Vargas and especially after Juscelino Kubitschek, promote great transformation in the industrial production of the country. But, as usual, the charge was much too heavy for the workers, that is, high inflation and decrease in the agricultural production. The creation of the National Confederation of Agricultural Farmers is one of the steps the rural workers come across when trying to get together and fight against the Agrarian Reform. The intensification of the contradictions in the field, a result from the subjection of the agrarian capital to the industrial one, the existence conditions of the rural worker, it all tends to worsen with low salaries, and the concentration of properties in the power of a few. One of the bigger fights of the rural workers is for the Statute for the Rural Worker, approved in 1963. The statute used to promote the union among wage earner rural workers, as well as lessees and smallholders. The union movement passes by a definition moment as for its role of work class conductor.

However, with the 1964 coup, they face the union movement at its climax. Most of the highly combative unions suffer governmental intervention, and those that worked with the motto of collaborationism or immobility before the new owner of the power (the military) were excluded from any attempt of governmental interference.

The same scheme of coercion adopted by the New State, concerning the unions and the working leaderships, is promoted by the military. Through Acts of Exception, the unions are widened, further separating the workers, the company commissions are extinct and the union leaderships are arrested. The whole period of military dictatorship was extremely difficult for the unions and the union movement in general. The unionization and the strikes

used to be discouraged among the workers, which grew more and more dependent on a totalitarian State, promoter of an excluding and money-centralizing model of development.

The working class used to be excluded from any effective political participation.

Final thoughts

This article intended to search for a connection between the concept assumed by the labor element in our society and the role played by the Unions in the cultural formation of the Brazilian workers.

It contributes for effecting a connection with the capitalist contemporaneous world and for an analysis of the facts that directly corroborate for the discussion about the need of having the unions as a representative of the workers.

CONSTITUIÇÃO HISTÓRICA DO MOVIMENTO SINDICAL BRASILEIRO

RESUMO: *Este artigo tem como proposta fazer uma reconstituição sócio-históricográfica do movimento sindical brasileiro. Traz os primeiros resultados acerca de um estudo mais amplo, que visa contribuir para a discussão que se trava na academia sobre a importância ou não dos sindicatos como órgãos de representação coletiva dos trabalhadores em nosso país. Hoje a grande questão, geradora de conflitos vários, é sobre a centralidade ou não do trabalho no capitalismo contemporâneo. Para adentrar na referida discussão sobre o sindicato, é essencial resgatar o conceito particular que cada período histórico atribuiu ao elemento em questão, destacando, através desta retomada histórica que nos dois períodos anteriores ao capitalismo, o trabalho era reconhecido como elemento caracterizador das classes inferiores. Sob o capitalismo, tal elemento assume um conceito inverso aos anteriores, revelando assim, que o trabalho assume em cada época a conceituação que é mais pertinente às classes dominantes.*

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *Brasil. Classe trabalhadora. Constituição histórica.*

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