

LABOR INTERNATIONALISM: U.S. Involvement in Brazilian Unions, 1945–1965*

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A major question confronting analysts of Latin American labor concerns the relationships among unions, the state, and foreign powers. Some social scientists have argued that the relative autonomy of unions affects the strength of democracy in a given country (see Weffort 1978; Hall and Garcia 1989; Epstein 1989; Cohen 1989; Collier and Collier 1991). They have also asserted that Latin America's ability to control its own destiny has been shaped in part by the influence of foreign powers (particularly the United States) over social institutions like unions (Bergquist 1986; Buchanan 1991; Spalding 1992–1993). An evolving branch of labor studies that now offers a unifying perspective for examining this complex set of relationships is the perspective of labor internationalism.

Since the late 1960s, scholars have increasingly turned their attention to this theme in analyzing the development of U.S. labor policy in the region (Spalding 1989). Current transformation of the world economy is making the study of international labor relations even more pertinent. In this context, many recent studies of U.S. involvement in Latin American unions have focused on Central America and Mexico, while only a few have emphasized South America (Spalding 1988; Frundt 1982; Cantor and Schor 1987; Welch and Pereira n.d.). This article offers the first case study of the early history of U.S. involvement in Brazilian unions.

Although sporadic contacts occurred before and during World War II, U.S. involvement in Brazilian union affairs was formalized during the postwar years (Welch 1987). Motivated by a rising tide of strikes in Brazil, early cold war worries about communist advances in Latin America, and the frankly imperial objective of exporting U.S. political values and institutional styles, U.S. policymakers decided to teach Brazilians how to manage labor relations in order to maintain productivity, promote stability, and keep out communist agitators. Although these motives remained

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substantially unchanged during the cold war years, the goals emphasized as well as the means used to implement them changed somewhat over time. In the early heady days that heralded the defeat of fascism, U.S. policymakers rarely questioned their capacity to make the world over in the idealized image of the United States. Once policymakers had secured the collaboration of the American Federation of Labor (AFL) and silenced alternative voices within the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), they began to put their training and reporting program into place (Berger 1966, 235–66). Events in Brazil persistently sidetracked U.S. intentions, however, and forced various changes in tactics.

For purposes of this study, the period from 1945 to 1965 has been subdivided into three shorter phases, each reflecting a shift in the execution of U.S. labor policy. From 1945 to 1952, the United States focused on fostering institutional change in Brazil. From 1952 until 1962, when President João Goulart began to take control of Brazil, U.S. representatives sought to implement a training and exchange program. After 1962, U.S. operatives apparently lost patience and began to anticipate working with the military government that overthrew Goulart in 1964.

THE U.S. POINT OF VIEW, 1945–1952

The period beginning with the closing months of World War II and lasting until 1952 laid the cornerstones of U.S. labor policy in Brazil. These foundations included isolating communist and nationalist unions and making a commitment to implanting among Brazilian workers an idealized version of the trade-union movement in the United States. The first steps toward these goals involved creating a Brazilian national labor federation modeled on the AFL and securing its affiliation with U.S.-sponsored international organizations. In the meantime, a collaborative relationship developed between the recently merged AFL-CIO and the U.S. State Department, one that still exists today.

In August 1945, Cecil Cross, the U.S. consul general in São Paulo, advocated sending interested Brazilian union leaders on a tour of the United States. Several of them had come to him seeking information about labor conditions in the United States, and Cross was convinced that the effect of such a tour “would be both profound and permanent.” The growing number of strikes in the state of São Paulo and the increasing militancy of many workers and leaders deeply concerned him: “The whole São Paulo labor situation has entered a period of flux and reorientation, and time is a crucial factor.”¹

The U.S. ambassador to Brazil, Adolph Berle, Jr., agreed that some-

1. Cross to the Secretary of State, 22 Aug. 1945, Record Group 59, Decimal File 832.5043, Dept. of State, U.S. National Archives. Hereafter, U.S. State Department documents will be cited in abbreviated form: RG number, DF decimal number, Dept. of State, USNA.

thing should be done. He and his staff soon developed a proposal entitled "Informational Program Directed toward Brazilian Labor." It called for using films, books, news bulletins, and exhibitions to "promote a better understanding of U.S. labor and laboring conditions among Brazilian workers." The understanding conveyed was to be selective, however. According to Berle, "The emphasis should be on efforts toward cooperative solution [of problems] and not on the existence of conflict either among workers or as between labor and other economic and social groups." To this end, Berle suggested that the propaganda program highlight the presence of "company towns and stores" in the United States, even though U.S. labor considered them "an element of oppression."²

Cross was attracted to the ambitious plan proposed by his boss and urged Washington to back the extensive propaganda and training campaign: "The moment is particularly favorable for the putting forward of the American point of view" among Brazilian union leaders.³ The plan also captured the imagination of Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs Spruille Braden, although he could not endorse the consul's sense of urgency. Two major stumbling blocks stood in the way of the plan's immediate implementation. As had occurred in Brazil, demobilization in the United States had ended the wartime cease-fire between labor and capital. In 1945 and 1946, U.S. industrial relations exploded in some of the largest and longest strikes in the country's history. By visiting this kind of living classroom, Braden wrote, the Brazilians would learn only how to run a U.S.-style strike. In addition, Braden was worried that the program would give "rise to accusations" that the United States "was attempting to practice an indirect form of intervention in the internal affairs" of Brazil. The benefits to be derived from the proposals were not worth the risk, in his opinion, and the government therefore should not "invite such accusations gratuitously."⁴

Berle agreed with Braden that the propaganda campaign would be more effective (and less likely to be criticized) if carried out by U.S. labor unions.⁵ But the division of the U.S. labor movement into two distinct umbrella organizations frustrated the state department's plans. Funda-

2. Berle to the Secretary of State, "Informational Program . . .," 19 Sept. 1945, RG 59, DF 832.504, Dept. of State, USNA, with enclosures: U.S. labor attaché Edward J. Rowell, "American Propaganda to Brazilian Workers"; and Convey Egan of the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs in Brazil, "Informational Activities Aimed at Brazilian Working-Class Audiences."

3. Cecil Cross to the Dept. of State, 20 Sept. 1945, Airgram no. 144, RG 59, DF 832.5043, Dept. of State, USNA.

4. Braden to Dr. Inman, 6 Feb. 1946; and Braden to Frank B. Kellogg, 6 Mar. 1946, in the Papers of Serafino Romualdi, box 9, file 1, Labor-Management Documentation Center, Martin P. Catherwood Library, Cornell University, Ithaca, N.Y. Hereafter cited as Romualdi Papers, with box and file numbers.

5. Berle to the Secretary of State, "Informational Program," 19 Sept. 1945, RG 59, DF 832.504, Dept. of State, USNA.

mental differences had led the CIO and AFL to endorse and pursue contrary policies in Latin America. At the Mexico City conference on war and peace in February 1945, the AFL backed the liberal economic measures introduced by the United States, which called for unrestricted trade, minimal state economic intervention, and private-sector development. The CIO, in contrast, backed the policy recommendations of the Confederación de Trabajadores de América Latina (CTAL), a ten-year-old inter-American labor organization based in Mexico that supported protectionist tariffs and state-directed development of basic industries (Mosk 1950, 17–25; Levenstein 1971, 206–42; Quintanilla Obregón 1982, 13–58). Although the U.S. State Department clearly preferred the AFL over the CIO, it had been unwilling thus far to risk alienating one union by openly favoring the other.⁶

But as economic conditions in Brazil worsened, U.S. officials became increasingly concerned about the enhanced potential there for the growth of the Communist Party (the Partido Comunista do Brasil, or PCB). U.S. labor attaché Edward Rowell reported, “The consensus in labor circles is that the PCB is growing in strength . . . , and unless there is a marked change in general economic conditions it will truly dominate any elections that might be held, let us say, four or six years hence.”⁷ Given these pressures, in mid-1946 the State Department quietly turned to the AFL for help. Embassies in Latin America were ordered to give “informal assistance” to Serafino Romualdi, the AFL’s chosen inter-American representative, who was scheduled to tour the region in June of that year. But Secretary of State James Byrnes also warned officials to “avoid any formal sponsorship of Mr. Romualdi’s activities that might give rise to charges that the State Department is favoring the AFL over the Congress of Industrial Organizations.”⁸

An Italian émigré, Romualdi was a fervent anticommunist and a strong trade unionist who had been working since 1943 to persuade the AFL to adopt a direct role in Latin American unions. While serving as an agent of the Office of Strategic Services in 1944 and 1945, Romualdi had developed contacts among Italian unionists in Brazil (Berger 1990, 5). Certain that the United States would “set the pace of industrial expansion” in South America, he argued that it was up to labor unions throughout the hemisphere to ensure that this expansion also raised the standard

6. See Berger (1966, 235–66); and James Byrnes, Secretary of State, 11 June 1946, RG 59, DF 810.504, Dept. of State, USNA.

7. Rowell, “Memorandum to Paul Daniels,” 14 Mar. 1946, enclosure in Clarence C. Brooks to the Secretary of State, 18 Mar. 1946, Despatch no. 4526, RG 59, DF 832.5045, Dept. of State, USNA.

8. James Byrnes to U.S. embassies and consulates in Caracas, Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, Montevideo, Buenos Aires, La Paz, Lima, Quito, Bogotá, Panama City, and Mexico City, 11 June 1946, RG 59, DF 810.504, Dept. of State, USNA.

of living of all workers.⁹ In response, the AFL hierarchy agreed that it was important “to raise labor standards in the South American countries so that there would be an equitable basis for commerce between the two continents.”¹⁰ Later, AFL Vice President George Meany argued that it was “up to the AFL to see to it that the workers of Latin America understand our philosophy, understand our desire to create a solid front among the working people of the hemisphere and to see to it these people do not listen to the mouthings of those who receive their orders from Moscow.”¹¹

Romualdi’s June trip to Latin America launched a pattern of collaboration between U.S. policymakers and AFL operatives that came to characterize U.S. involvement in regional union affairs. In Rio de Janeiro, the U.S. embassy staff received Romualdi warmly, and in São Paulo, Cross placed his staff at the labor envoy’s “disposal with instructions to cooperate to the limit.” As Romualdi reported later, his mission in Brazil would have been impossible to carry out without the assistance of U.S. government personnel (Romualdi 1967, 47). Following the announcement of President Harry Truman’s famous 1947 doctrine of communist containment, the AFL–State Department partnership solidified further. Meeting with Braden in April, Romualdi reported that “the attitude of the State Department towards our [AFL] efforts to combat Communists and other totalitarian influences in Latin American labor, will from now on be not only sympathetic but cooperative.” Romualdi claimed that Braden “went even further by pledging . . . whatever assistance (compatible with the obvious limitations of non-direct government interference and diplomatic propriety) we may require in our work. . . .”¹² Official support for the AFL indeed intensified in subsequent years.

Making two trips to Latin America in 1946, Romualdi focused on developing contacts with pro-U.S. unionists and appealing for their help in establishing a new hemispheric labor organization that was intended to rival the Mexico-based CTAL. Romualdi agreed with the U.S. State Department in considering the CTAL a communist-directed organization because of its affiliation with the World Federation of Trade Unions. The WFTU was an international labor organization composed of national union groups as diverse as the British Trade Unions Council, the CIO, and many Soviet labor federations (see Kofas 1992 and Weiler 1981). In general, WFTU member organizations were statist unions that depended more on the government for their legitimacy and effectiveness than did

9. Romualdi to Matthew Woll, 18 Dec. 1943, Romualdi Papers, box 1, file 1. See also Romualdi (1947, 1967) and Berger (1990).

10. Minutes of the meeting of the Committee on International Labor Relations, American Federation of Labor, 2 Aug. 1946, as cited in Berger (1966, 264).

11. Meany, “Pan-American Day Address,” 11 Oct. 1946, cited in Romualdi (1967, 47).

12. Romualdi to Florence Thorne (secretary to AFL President William Green), 15 Apr. 1947, Romualdi Papers, box 9, file 2.

the so-called free trade and craft unions belonging to the AFL. In this sense, Brazilian unions too were far more statist than free.

The modern structure of Brazilian unions had been established largely by the Estado Novo, a corporatist system imposed between 1937 and 1945 under the rule of President Getúlio Vargas. In 1943 the corporatist labor relations system was codified in the *Consolidação das Leis do Trabalho* (CLT), with executive authority vested in the labor ministry. Using this structure, the state could exercise enormous control over unions, including the power to recognize petitions to form new unions, administer the election of officers, collect and distribute union dues (known in Brazil as *o imposto sindical*), and place uncooperative unions in trusteeship (see Brazil MTIC 1943 and French 1992). According to the much more liberal U.S. views on state-labor relations, this system constituted a nightmare. Romualdi stated flatly that the government's control of the unions was "one of the major contributing factors of the political chaos and economic disaster that plagued Brazil," and he therefore urged Brazilian labor leaders to liberate their organizations from "every form of government control and domination."¹³

Without reflecting on the inherent contradictions, Romualdi was in effect advising his peers in Brazil to use the government to escape the government. He also encouraged fellow unionists to secure labor ministry approval for establishing a national labor federation like the AFL. The new Brazilian body would be able to elect delegates to attend the upcoming conference of the International Labor Organization (ILO). They would then join with others in "plans for the organization of an Inter-American body opposed to totalitarianism." This body would serve as a regional arm of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), the global organization eventually established by the AFL to compete with the WFTU. Finally, in various meetings with labor leaders, Romualdi advised the Brazilians to send selected members to the United States and to invite AFL experts to Brazil to learn "the elementary rules of independent trade unionism."¹⁴

Romualdi arrived in Brazil at a crucial moment in the national struggle for labor autonomy. Since the end of fighting in the European theatre of World War II, forces had been marshalled supporting or opposing continuation of Vargas's tenure as head of state. One of these factors was labor, and even though Vargas was forced out of office in October 1945, the labor movement continued to play an influential role in politics during this period of democratization. One of the most active groups in 1945 and 1946 was the PCB-led *Movimento Unificador dos Trabalhadores*

13. "Meeting with Trade-Union Leaders," in Romualdi to Woll, 5 July 1946, Romualdi Papers, box 2, file 6.

14. Romualdi to Woll, 5 July 1946, Romualdi Papers, box 2, file 6.

(MUT). Although it lacked official status, the MUT supported the corporatist labor system as a means of protecting the working class from the capitalist class and sought to strengthen it in collaboration with the government. In January 1946, MUT coordinators sponsored a conference in São Paulo that urged workers to support formation of a permanent national labor federation (Carone 1981, 186–88). Organized workers in various cities responded to the call, but the government outlawed the MUT in April and intervened to replace the officers of MUT-linked unions (Werneck Vianna 1976, 254–56).

U.S. officials did not uniformly support the repression of the MUT. Rowell, the U.S. labor attaché in Rio, worried that the government's actions would only strengthen the appeal of the PCB and emphasized the need for positive alternatives. In Rowell's view, what was needed was for "the government or the producing classes to embark on a program that would result in genuine improvements in the standard of living of the working classes and the elimination of the elements which they feel are exploiting them."¹⁵

Romualdi welcomed the MUT's demise. He believed the institutional power of the labor ministry could be used to overcome the spirited organizing work of the PCB. He therefore proposed the idea of having the ministry seize the MUT's strategy and itself sponsor the creation of a national labor federation. Romualdi was sure the ministry would exclude militants and communists, the first order of business in his mind. Demonstrating that the autonomy of Brazilian labor could wait, Romualdi met covertly with a number of ministry officials in June 1946. He was pleased when Minister Octacílio Negro de Lima announced plans to hold a national labor congress in Recife at the end of July.¹⁶ Supporters of the original MUT conference were still powerful in the unions, however, and to buy time to ensure a compliant delegation, the ministry postponed the congress until late September and moved it to the national capital in Rio.¹⁷

15. Rowell to the Secretary of State, 26 July 1946, RG 59, DF 832.5043; and Parsloe to U.S. Embassy in Rio, 23 Feb. 1946, RG 59, DF 832.5043, both in Dept. of State, USNA. Generally speaking, Rowell was more independent-minded than most incoming U.S. foreign policy-makers, to such an extent that some questioned his politics (see French 1992, 342, n. 47).

16. Romualdi to Woll, 5 July 1946, Romualdi Papers, box 2, file 6. That Romualdi so quickly embraced the small labor sector linked to government seems to contradict his stated desire to free Brazilian unions from ministry oversight. In retrospect, this contradiction apparently disturbed him as well. In the memoirs he wrote twenty years later, Romualdi emphasized how careful he was to avoid contact with government officials because he "refused to be a party to the government's domination of labor." While in Brazil, however, Romualdi met with a number of labor ministry officials and boasted at the time that he had an interview with the "Chief of Cabinet" of that very ministry (see Romualdi 1967, 273).

17. Attaché Clarence Brooks to the Secretary of State, 2 Aug. 1946, RG 59, DF 832.5043, Dept. of State, USNA. The attaché said that his insights were drawn from "conversations with responsible officers in the Ministry of Labor. . . ." There are no definitive accounts of

The ministry's efforts to control the outcome of the congress proved futile. Revealing the independence of the labor movement, the congress embarrassed the government by demonstrating the smallness of the minority of unionists willing to practice what Romualdi preached. More than two thousand delegates representing a thousand unions attended the meeting. They fell into three main factions: those aligned with the PCB, those backing the labor party, the Partido Trabalhista Brasileiro (PTB), and those going along with the government labor ministry. While the majority of PCB- and PTB-linked delegates agreed on a variety of resolutions, including steps toward greater autonomy, the three-way division of the delegates became controversial when the subject of establishing a national labor union was introduced. Delegates loyal to the ministry, including those whom Romualdi had recently befriended, confronted PCB members and walked out in protest. "The labor ministry's faithful minority abandoned the meeting," reported *The Economist*, and the labor minister dissolved the congress. A few days later, on 22 September, more than a thousand dissident delegates met and formed the Confederação dos Trabalhadores do Brasil (CTB). In a separate convention, some 240 pro-government delegates founded the Confederação Nacional dos Trabalhadores (CNT). Thus when the congress exposed the government's weak support among labor, the ministry used its power to mask the loss of face by recognizing only the CNT.¹⁸ The legal standing of the CTB remained uncertain, even though it viewed itself as a collaborator rather than an opponent of the state-centered system of labor relations (Werneck Vianna 1976, 259).

Romualdi milked the split for all its potential benefits. The incident had separated out "stooges" and "fellow travelers" as well as communists, all of whom could be isolated by their affiliation with the CTB. Meanwhile, Romualdi's allies in the CNT could benefit from governmental favoritism. His divisionist tactics were rewarded when the AFL's recently selected São Paulo corresponding secretary, Deocleciano Hollanda de Cavalcanti (president of the city's food workers' union), was named as the first president of the CNT. Further encouragement came when the labor ministry agreed to sponsor sending a CNT delegate, Renato Socci of the Rio maritime workers federation, to the Montreal convention of the ILO.¹⁹

But Romualdi's dream of eventually dealing only with the CNT

this important congress. Conflicting information can be found in the documents consulted here and in Rodrigues (1986, 538), French (1992, 189–95), and Werneck Vianna (1976, 257–60).

18. *The Economist*, 19 Oct. 1946, cited in Goldman to Hussey, 20 Nov. 1946; see also Rowell to State, Despatch no. 594, 17 Sept. 1946; and John Edgar Hoover to Jack Neal, 1 Oct. 1946, all in RG 59, DF 832.504/3, Dept. of State, USNA. See also Telles (1981, 243–59).

19. See Romualdi (1967, 45–48) and Romualdi to the AFL International Relations Committee, 10 Sept. 1946, Romualdi Papers, box 9, file 1.

was ultimately frustrated by Brazilian law and politics. A number of federal legislators complained that the government had overstepped its authority in recognizing the CNT because the 1946 constitution had no provisions for a national labor body. The Brazilian Congress would have to amend the law, but the legislature was divided over the issue. Conservatives saw no benefit in loosening government control over the labor movement, while PCB and PTB representatives preferred to see the CTB recognized rather than the CNT. After much debate, the law was left unchanged, and the labor ministry had to retract recognition of the CNT because the labor code permitted unions to unify nationally only within economic sectors. Consequently, the CNT was transformed in April 1947 into two separate groups: the CNTI (Confederação Nacional dos Trabalhadores na Indústria) for industrial workers and the CNTC (Confederação Nacional dos Trabalhadores no Comércio) for workers in commerce (Telles 1981, 179–93). These changes left no room at all for the CTB. It was therefore outlawed in May, when the ministry intervened in 400 of 944 legally recognized unions and ousted their officers (Carone 1982, 281–83).

Finding his allies' efforts to establish a central federation blocked, Romualdi turned his attention in 1947 to winning Brazilian affiliation with a regional labor organization called the Confederação Inter-Americano de Trabajo (CIT). In August Romualdi went to Brazil again, but rather than try to organize support among labor leaders, he concentrated on the government, knowing that Brazilian law prohibited unions from joining any international organization. Changing the law would take time, so he lobbied the labor ministry to allow delegates to attend the CIT's founding congress scheduled for Lima in January 1948. He reasoned that once the CIT had been established with Brazilian participation, lobbying to change the law could proceed more methodically. Strangely unconcerned about his contacts with the Brazilian government, Romualdi reported in his memoir, "the Minister of Labor and the Presidential entourage wanted to know many, many things before committing themselves. Above all, they wanted to know the position of the American Embassy and the United States Government vis-à-vis this proposed Lima meeting. Although I could not speak for the State Department, I assured the Brazilians that my demarché was favored by Washington. In a few days I was promised that a large delegation would attend the Lima Conference" (Romualdi 1967, 71–72). Romualdi related that after President Eurico Gaspar Dutra consulted with him, the chief executive made the decision himself. But as Romualdi was to discover, Dutra's willingness to send delegates to Lima was not the same as pushing for the legal changes that would allow Brazilian unions to affiliate with the CIT.

Although a Brazilian delegate was elected as one of CIT's ten vice presidents (Cid Cabral de Mello, president of the Rio commercial workers' federation), affiliation would be another four years in coming. Bra-

zilian workers soon realized that the CIT was advocating U.S. values and policy, not Latin American beliefs and desires, and so they postponed joining it. Ideologically, the platform of the CIT was inconsistent with the Brazilian political and labor relations system. Its main ideas—national labor unity, collective bargaining, the unhampered right to strike, and universal manhood suffrage—all conflicted with the corporatist ideology of managed political and economic participation that dominated the Brazilian state. According to the labor code, both workers and employers alike were organized in state-sanctioned syndicates that were neither free trade unions nor voluntary professional associations. Their bargaining activities were regulated purposely by the state, not by market forces. The interests of each group were not to be fought out in the street but through the administrative and judicial arms of the labor ministry, an institution that claimed to represent the greater interests of both capital and labor, just as a father knows the best interests of his children. Moreover, Brazilians acquired the right to vote not by turning twenty-one but by demonstrating through one's education or membership in a syndicate that one was prepared to contribute to the progress of the fatherland (Gomes 1988). These values were deeply ingrained in Brazilian society, to such an extent that at least one worker-delegate to the Lima conference, Antônio Soares Campos of the Rio maritime workers federation, vehemently opposed affiliation, claiming that the CIT "upheld principles of the class struggle incompatible with the Brazilian social system."²⁰

The Dutra administration's objections to affiliation were less philosophical and more pragmatic than the seafarer's. To the great dissatisfaction of the Brazilian government, the CIT stressed U.S. objectives in the region rather than Latin American ones. Before Dutra approved the Lima delegation, he asked Romualdi if Brazil could count on support from the CIT at an inter-American economic conference scheduled for March 1948. Like other Latin American nations, Brazil wanted U.S. support for its plans for postwar development. As is well known, the Truman administration refused to support these ambitions, arguing that rebuilding Europe had to take priority over industrializing Latin America.²¹ Romualdi's response to Dutra's request was vague, but his role at the Lima conference left no doubt that the CIT was going to place U.S. objectives ahead of Brazilian ones. For example, Romualdi helped strike down motions supporting Dutra's position favoring economic planning and criticizing U.S. imperialism, and Romualdi succeeded in eliminating any language that might "be contrary to the economic views of the U.S. labor movement" (Romualdi 1967, 82–83).

20. Chargé d'Affairs in Rio to the Secretary of State, 5 Mar. 1948, RG 59, DF 832.5043, Dept. of State, USNA.

21. The content of the Romualdi-Dutra conversation is revealed in Clarence Brooks to Secretary of State, 5 Nov. 1947, RG 59, DF 832.5043, Dept. of State, USNA.

Dutra soured on the CIT, adopting a noncommittal stance. Although the government did not prevent Brazilian labor representatives from attending CIT meetings, it refused to finance such trips with union funds and stalled on the question of affiliation. Only when pressured directly by U.S. Ambassador Herschel Johnson, who personally discussed the matter with Dutra's foreign and labor ministers in October 1950, did the president finally send a message to congress requesting legislative amendments. By that time, Dutra was a lame duck, soon to be replaced as president by Getúlio Vargas. With politics in transition, no action would be taken on the question for another two years.²²

Vargas won the October 1950 presidential election by appealing for working-class support (French 1992, 247–67). The issue of affiliation remained central to U.S. labor policy, but it was not as important to Vargas and his new administration. While Vargas was suspicious and fearful of PCB strength in the labor movement, he wanted to reward workers for their support of his candidacy and therefore allowed new union elections to be held to clear away the government-appointed trustees (*interventores*) put in place by his predecessor. More confident of labor's allegiance to his labor party, Vargas was ready to consider the question of affiliation by 1952, when he appointed José de Segades Vianna as labor minister.

A PTB legislator and one of the key framers of Brazilian labor law, Vianna had ambitions of heading the International Labor Organization. But this prestigious position could not be won if Brazil continued to snub the United States and its international labor bodies such as the Organización Regional Interamericana de Trabajo (ORIT), which had replaced the CIT in January. Thus in anticipation of an ILO congress in Geneva, Vianna and Vargas pressured the Brazilian Congress to allow affiliation in July.²³ Vargas was soon rewarded when the ORIT held its second congress in Rio de Janeiro to honor and fortify its new Brazilian alliances.²⁴

By 1952, the cornerstones of U.S. involvement in Brazilian unions were in place. The AFL and CIO had been unified and the CTAL over-

22. In a January 1952 memorandum, labor attaché Henry S. Hammond speculated as to why affiliation was still unrealized: an "inner government circle" might be resisting the project; the Brazilian Congress really was backlogged with more important matters; or the Vargas administration disliked the current labor leadership and wanted it changed before permission to affiliate would be granted. See Hammond to Rio counsel Sheldon T. Mills, 10 Jan. 1952. Hammond's replacement, Irving Salert, suggested a fourth reason: that Cavalcanti (Romualdi's principal labor ally in Brazil) was feuding with CIT president Bernardo Ibáñez and was therefore unwilling to lobby the administration for affiliation. Salert to Secretary of State, 5 Mar. 1952, Despatch no. 1460. Both in RG 84, post files 310, Dept. of State, USNA.

23. Salert to State, 19 May 1952, Despatch no. 1941, RG 59, DF 832.06; and Salert to Secretary of State, 25 July 1952, Despatch no. 131, RG 84, post files 310, both in Dept. of State, USNA.

24. U.S. labor attaché Irving Salert to the Dept. of State, Despatch no. 917, and U.S. Embassy in Montevideo to the Dept. of State, Despatch no. 492, both in RG 84, post files 310, Dept. of State, USNA.

shadowed by the U.S.-dominated ORIT.²⁵ Communist and nationalist leaders had been isolated, alliances had been made with anticommunist leaders, and an institutional structure compatible with U.S. interests had been established. Yet not one of these achievements had been fulfilled according to any plan, nor had action been taken on the propaganda and educational program proposed back in 1945. Consequently, none of the stones sat quite right. Leftist-nationalist leaders might have been thrust out of the limelight, but they still retained substantial popularity. Those allied with the U.S. perspective, in contrast, were some of the least popular leaders. John Fishburn, a career Latin American labor specialist working in the State Department from 1943 to 1966, observed, "ORIT took on all the fallen labor leaders."²⁶ Meanwhile, the Brazilian union structure remained statist and politicized, a situation U.S. operatives claimed to oppose but actually accommodated and even nurtured. Perhaps the most striking thing about this foundation was its instability, given that both the Brazilian government and the Brazilian labor movement were responding more to local considerations than to the wishes of the United States.

ORIT AND POINT FOUR, 1952–1962

After the CNTI (the Brazilian industrial workers' confederation) joined ORIT in 1952, the larger organization set up a travel and training program much like the one proposed by Cross and Berle just after the war. Funded under the Point Four initiative announced by President Truman as part of his 1949 inaugural address on the "four freedoms," the new program counted on close cooperation between the U.S. Foreign Service and ORIT directors like the AFL's Romualdi. As Fishburn explained, "ORIT was bought and paid for by Uncle Sam." Romualdi, Fishburn, and their colleagues first identified "suitable leaders" to send to the United States for training, which invariably meant anticommunist leaders. The ultimate goal of the Point Four program was to make them pro-United States. In this way, it promised to help in the all-important struggle against communist and independent unionists, a broad category that also included nationalist, Peronist, socialist, and simply uncooperative

25. This event was important to the United States because it meant that Latin American unions lacking AFL endorsement would have no other place to turn to get support from their comparatively rich union brothers in the United States. In a confidential circular to consular offices in Latin America, the U.S. State Department underscored this implication: "CIO participation also makes it impossible for the communist-led CTAL to utilize alleged support or sympathies from any important United States labor organization." Because ORIT "holds a number of objectives in common with the United States Government, including opposition to aggressive totalitarianism," the circular advised foreign service officers to "cooperate" with the organization. See Dept. of State Inter-American Affairs, Regional Circular no. 4, 8 May 1951, RG 84, post files 560, Dept. of State, USNA.

26. Interview with John T. Fishburn, former attaché to the U.S. Dept. of Labor, Woodstock, Va., 27 Apr. 1985.

unionists (Thorp 1950; Hanson 1950; Griffith 1982). Romualdi, Fishburn, and other officials expected great results from this effort over the course of the decade.²⁷

The purpose of Point Four was to fight communism with prosperity, as suggested by the very title of the enabling legislation, the Mutual Security Act. Sections 516 and 528 of the act called on the United States to encourage the establishment in participating countries of "fair labor standards of wages and working conditions" and the development of "free labor union movements as the collective bargaining agencies of labor." According to the guidelines, the goals of Point Four were to increase productivity and foster "balanced economic and social development" as well as "a strong free trade-union movement [that would] contribute to all of these objectives and [be] the best assurance against the invasion of workers' groups by professional communist and other revolutionaries."²⁸ These were precisely the same principles guiding ORIT. In the context of the 1950s, both the U.S. State Department and the AFL viewed technical training and assistance as central to fulfilling this mission.

The first Point Four training program for Brazil got underway in January 1953, when a group of ten students arrived at American University in Washington, D.C. These first trainees were not labor leaders but technicians from the Brazilian labor ministry and instructors in a management-run, government-sanctioned worker training and assistance center, the Serviço Social da Indústria (SESI).²⁹ During their six-month stay, they studied U.S. labor economics, statistics, and history. After three weeks of intensive English, the group turned to "an analysis of the human factors influencing productivity," the overall theme of the program.³⁰ Later they went to Pennsylvania State College for a six-week program in U.S. trade-union history, structure, and operations.³¹ The Brazilians spent their final weeks visiting unions and factories to observe operations.

U.S. policymakers may have planned to influence the Brazilian labor ministry and SESI professionals (as well as their future working-

27. *Ibid.*

28. "Policy Guidance regarding Labor and Manpower Aspects of Technical Cooperation Program," a confidential policy statement from the Acting Administrator to Technical Cooperation Country Director, All Missions, 5 Mar. 1952, RG 84, post files 560, Dept. of State, USNA.

29. Maximilian Wallach, chief of American Republics Program Operations, to U.S. labor attaché Irving Salert, "Brazilian Labor Department Group," 28 Jan. 1953, RG 84, Rio de Janeiro post files, Dept. of State, USNA.

30. U.S. Department of Labor, Office of International Labor Affairs, "Tentative Point-Four Training Program for Brazilian Labor Department Group 1, January 26–July 25, 1953," RG 84, Rio de Janeiro post files, Dept. of State, USNA.

31. Some of the instructors at Pennsylvania State were Professors Joseph Raybeck, Edward Abramson, Eugene A. Myers, Ronaldo Donovan, Fred Hoehler, Jr., and A. H. Reeds. See Eugene A. Myers to the Policy Committee, "Weekly Report no. 3," 2 Mar. 1953, RG 84, Rio post files, Dept. of State, USNA.

class students) by training these visitors first. Such employees were natural choices for the program because the double-edged goal of fighting communism and enhancing labor-force productivity was shared by the Brazilian institutions as well. As Roberto Simonsen, a founder of SESI, explained: "SESI . . . will enable the Brazilian working masses to cross the Red Sea of oppressive and inhumane totalitarianism without wetting their feet in it, and, after the undoubtedly arduous journey, [the workers] will breathe the clean Brazilian air, purified by our civic spirit and by our vocation for democracy" (Simonsen, as cited in Weinstein 1990, 398; see also Gomes 1988).

But although U.S. and Brazilian goals were similar, the two countries' interests often diverged, generating tensions between officials. For example, U.S. officials were convinced that trade unions free of management and government control were ideal and therefore wanted to eliminate the interventionist aspects of the labor ministry. In January 1956, Romualdi revealed a four-point plan that he had worked out with the new U.S. ambassador to Brazil, James Dunn. The first two points called for "lifting the strangling government control over union bargaining procedures" and "stopping the practice of government intervention" in Brazilian unions.³² This approach was anathema to Brazilian bureaucrats, who believed the labor movement would fall apart or fall into the hands of the communists without ministry intervention. The United States recognized the potential for disruption but claimed to prefer to risk it, confident that such efforts would eventually win over the Brazilians.³³

As one might expect, shades of difference separated AFL and government opinions on this point. AFL operatives showed greater interest in the withering away of the Brazilian state than did U.S. policy-makers. For the latter, the character and ideology of those holding the reins of power mattered most. If U.S. officials liked the current Brazilian labor minister, then Brazilian government meddling in the labor movement troubled them less than if the minister was someone they distrusted.

While the 1953 training session was underway in the United States, three Brazilian labor leaders were sent to an ORIT training school at the

32. Romualdi to George Meany, "Background Information on Brazilian President-elect Kubitschek," 4 Jan. 1956, Romualdi Papers, box 2, file 5. By using the term *intervention* in the second point, Romualdi referred to the capacity of the Labor ministry to unseat elected union officials, appoint a caretaker board of directors, and order new elections.

33. In 1953 and 1956, U.S. labor scholar Robert J. Alexander traveled on fact-finding missions to Latin America for the AFL. On both occasions, he commented on government control of the labor movement in Brazil. He also noted that liberalization would benefit communists initially but concluded that there was "no alternative but to continue to push for the conversion of the remnants of the fascist corporate system into real trade unionism." See Alexander, "Report from Robert Alexander," Uruguay, 13 May 1956, Romualdi Papers, box 2, file 6.

University of Puerto Rico. The unionists selected were Enoch Gresenberg, president of the light and power union in São Paulo, Alberto Bettamio, president of the Rio Sindicato dos Trabalhadores em Empresas Comerciais de Minérios e Combustíveis Mineraias, and Luiz José Baptista Guimarães, president of Rio's Sindicato dos Empregados no Comércio. The U.S. consul general in São Paulo picked Gresenberg, while Irving Salert, the new U.S. labor attaché at the embassy in Rio, chose the other two. Salert seemed impressed by the commitment of his nominees to union work, describing Bettamio's union as "one of the few . . . that has completely organized the industry" in Rio. The union had also set up a primary school for the children of members. Guimarães appealed to Salert because of his knowledge of Brazilian labor law and his cooperation in helping the labor attaché establish worker education programs in Rio.³⁴ It should also be noted that Gresenberg and Bettamio worked in strategic industries (electric utilities and oil production) where foreign investment, ownership, and control was an important issue at the time (Skidmore 1967).

Regarding the ORIT program, the U.S. government coordinator of Point Four, Maximilian Wallach, stayed "in almost daily contact with Serafino Romualdi." Wallach claimed that "most of the arrangements for the ORIT project [were] done by my shop," meaning the American Republics Program of the U.S. Department of Labor.³⁵ In 1954 Salert selected eight Brazilian unionists to send to a new ORIT school in Montevideo, Uruguay. In May Salert himself was given permission by the State Department to shelve his embassy duties for two weeks in order to lecture at the school.³⁶ In October 1955, Salert prepared Romualdi's itinerary for a visit to Brazil that included a meeting with Ambassador Dunn. As Salert reported, the AFL operative "urged" the ambassador to support Romualdi's effort to provide a Brazilian university with a Point Four grant. He also thanked Dunn for backing the labor-leader exchange program and explained that the AFL was working "closely with U.S. government agencies" to make sure that the Brazilians visiting the United States "understand the necessity of combating communism in a positive way."³⁷

In reality, the U.S. budget for the Brazilian leader exchange program was quite small: less than four thousand dollars in 1954, and about five thousand in 1955. These figures represented about 1 percent of the

34. Salert to Romualdi, 16 Jan. 1953, RG 84, Rio post files, Dept. of State, USNA.

35. Wallach to Salert, 28 Jan. 1953, p. 2, RG 84, Rio post files, Dept. of State, USNA.

36. Salert to Wallach, 18 Aug. 1953, RG 84, Rio labor post files 560, and Smith to U.S. Embassy in Rio, Airgram no. 317, 29 Apr. 1954, RG 84, Rio post files 310, both in Dept. of State, USNA.

37. Salert to the Dept. of State, Despatch no. 573, 28 Oct. 1955, RG 84, Rio post files 560, Dept. of State, USNA.

total annual budget for U.S. propaganda in Brazil.³⁸ Frustrated by this low level of support, Salert argued for expanding the program significantly in 1957. He recommended sponsoring 150 Brazilian labor leaders on three-month trips to the United States every year until 10 percent of the leadership of national, state, and local unions had gotten a chance to see U.S. trade unions in action. Salert claimed that "literally hundreds of applicants" had called on him for scholarships. In his view, the program had already "become the most important adjunct to the Brazilian trade-union movement" and an essential tool in helping union leaders to "become articulate champions of democracy and anti-communism."³⁹

The actual effectiveness of the program is difficult to measure. Officials like Salert and Romualdi sang its praises, wasting no chance to celebrate successes and report back to Washington the glowing comments of Brazilians just returned from the States. For example, in a 1957 dispatch, Salert quoted at length Hilário José Buselatto, city councilman and union member from Caxias do Sul in the state of Rio Grande do Sul: "I know now why American workers are anti-communist. They live and work with dignity. . . . [N]ow I have seen the living conditions myself. . . . We have to rid our unions of communists and I will lead the fight."⁴⁰ Another trainee, Domingos Savino, identified as president of the "Union of Workers in Farinaceous Industries," reported to the consulate in São Paulo an incident in which he successfully outdebated PCB director Luis Carlos Prestes in a discussion of U.S. economic imperialism.⁴¹ In November 1958, a number of graduates of the program established the Eloy Chaves Club in São Paulo.⁴² Much to the satisfaction of U.S. officials, club members traveled around the state recounting their positive experiences in the United States and explaining "free trade unionism."⁴³

Close alliance with the United States did not guarantee a labor leader's success in Brazil, however. The careers of two of the first ORIT trainees, Gresenberg and Bettamio, actually collapsed after their training

38. U.S. Information Service attaché William C. Trimble to the Ambassador, "USIS Operations," 28 Sept. 1954, RG 84, Brazil-USA Rio post files 320, Dept. of State, USNA.

39. Salert to the Dept. of State, "Labor Participation Project for Fiscal Year 1957," 5 Sept. 1956, Despatch no. 270, RG 59, DF 832.06/9-556, Dept. of State, USNA. In this same despatch, Salert claimed that "approximately 1,000 well-trained communist agents" were operating within Brazilian unions. His proposal for building up labor leadership purportedly would have bridged this training gap in ten years.

40. Salert to Dept. of State, Despatch no. 939, 20 Feb. 1957, RG 59, DF 832.062/2-2057, Dept. of State, USNA.

41. São Paulo Consul General Richard P. Butrick to Dept. of State, Despatch no. 163, 10 Oct. 1958, RG 59, DF 832.062/10-1058, Dept. of State, USNA.

42. This organization was named after the State Secretary of Justice and Public Safety in the state of São Paulo, who convinced industrialists to negotiate a settlement with workers in the 1917 general strike rather than simply repressing the strike.

43. Several reports, including Butrick to Dept. of State, Despatch no. 62, 13 Aug. 1958, RG 59, DF 832.062/8-1358, and Consul Ralph J. Burton to Dept. of State, Despatch no. 341, 20 Jan. 1959, DF 832.062/1-2059, both in Dept. of State, USNA.

in 1953. Gresenberg's opponents in the union of the São Paulo light and power company used his visit to the United States to discredit him in the eyes of union members. Shortly after his return, he lost reelection as president of the union and decided to abandon union work.⁴⁴ In 1957 Bettamio too failed to win election as president of the national-level organization of his union, the oil workers' federation. According to Salert, Bettamio lost by 250 votes out of 2,500 cast to a slate led by Doménico Sérgio. Charging fraud, Bettamio asked the labor ministry to overturn the results and call a new election. The second time, however, management and not the communists were blamed for pressuring workers to vote for Sérgio. Salert's quarterly labor reports never mentioned the election or Bettamio again.⁴⁵

The case of 1956 Point Four grant recipient José Sanches Duran, who was president of the São Paulo state federation of metalworkers, offers an interesting reflection of the troubles encountered by this U.S. labor policy toward the end of the 1950s. During Duran's training in the United States, he was befriended by George Meany, Serafino Romualdi, and other U.S. labor officials. Duran and other labor leaders invited Meany to Brazil for an official visit, and when Duran returned to São Paulo in October, he began "coaching a group of twenty-five presidents" of metalworkers' locals around the state "on American methods of negotiations." Such an enthusiastic response pleased both AFL and U.S. government officials.⁴⁶

But after Meany's visit at the end of the year, the honeymoon with Duran began to sour, and the United States' tenuous grip on the Brazilian metalworkers began to slip until relations with this strategic movement all but ended. Duran stopped showing up at meetings called by labor attaché Salert and refused to respond to the pressure of fellow trainees who wanted him to attend their meetings. Worse still, informants such as metalworker José Maria Ribeiro reported that Duran was helping the communists by warning them that "one of their trusted leaders was a plant of the state security police." Salert considered the reasons for Duran's new aloof posture, speculating that the federation president was afraid to "give his enemies ammunition" by "making his friendship for the United States too conspicuous."⁴⁷ By August 1957, Duran had grown too soft on communism for some free trade unionists, but his shift to the

44. U.S. Consul in São Paulo Philip Raine to Dept. of State, "Labor Organization of the Light and Power Company," Despatch no. 54, 5 Oct. 1956, RG 59, DF 832.062/10-556, Dept. of State, USNA.

45. Salert to Dept. of State, "First Quarterly Labor Report," Despatch no. 1117, 5 Apr. 1957; and Salert to Dept. of State, "Second Quarterly Labor Report—1957," Despatch no. 1424, 28 June 1957, both in RG 59, DF 832.06, Dept. of State, USNA.

46. See Romualdi to Salert, 26 June 1956, in Romualdi Papers, box 2, file 5; and Butrick to Dept. of State, "Ceremony of Presentation of Certificates to Point IV Labor Trainees," Despatch no. 76, 29 Oct. 1956, RG 59, DF 832.062, Dept. of State, USNA.

47. Butrick to Dept. of State, Despatch no. 187, 1 Mar. 1957, RG 59, DF 832.062, Dept. of State, USNA.

left proved too opportunistic to save his reelection as president. By the time of the large general strike in October, his name had disappeared from embassy dispatches.⁴⁸

A month later in November, the metalworkers held their first national convention in Porto Alegre, bringing added frustrations for U.S. labor policy in Brazil. With the fall of Duran and the success of the communist-oriented strike, U.S. stature within the labor movement was at a low ebb. U.S. officials continued nevertheless to try to establish ties with the metalworkers through one of their last remaining collaborators, Antônio Fernandes de Lima, president of the metalworkers' local in Niterói. Lima was interviewed about the convention by assistant labor attaché James Shea and was then nominated for a Point Four scholarship. The São Paulo delegation to the convention, in contrast, was dominated by independent leaders like José Busto, secretary general of the São Paulo local, and Waldimir Jorge Schnor, Duran's replacement as president of the state federation. At the Porto Alegre convention, Busto reportedly pushed for affiliation with the communist-dominated World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) and denounced ORIT as "a tool of the [U.S.] state department." Convention leaders "head[ed] off this campaign" by appointing a commission to study the issue. This outcome was a matter of grave concern to U.S. policymakers and labor operatives.⁴⁹

With one hundred and twenty thousand members, Busto's São Paulo local was by far the largest unit (the national membership totaled two hundred thousand, according to U.S. Foreign Service estimates).⁵⁰ Thus at the union's second congress in São Paulo in April 1959, U.S. State Department officials were especially anxious about the question of international affiliation. Officially, the congress invited two groups to send representatives. The International Metalworkers Federation (IMF), linked to the ILO in Geneva, was asked to help pay for the congress and to send representatives as well. The commission appointed to study the question had equivocated, deciding to recommend maintaining friendly relations with both international organizations. But this approach was unacceptable to the AFL-CIO, and in March, George Meany advised ORIT's parent organization, the ICFTU, and the IMF to boycott the congress. With only the WFTU represented, the metalworkers' federation voted to formalize cooperative relations with that international body.⁵¹

48. Butrick to Dept. of State, "Labor Leader Talks Straight to Commies," Despatch no. 72, 30 Aug. 1957; and Butrick to Dept. of State, "The São Paulo Strike of October 15–25, 1957," Despatch no. 215, 10 Dec. 1957, both in RG 59, DF 832.062, Dept. of State, USNA.

49. James F. Shea to Dept. of State, "Memorandum of Conversation with Antonio Fernandes de Lima," Despatch no. 1025, 9 Mar. 1959, RG59 Rio de Janeiro, DF 832.062/3-959, USNA.

50. Wallner to Secretary of State, Airgram no. 1049, RG 59, DF 832.062, Dept. of State, USNA.

51. See Dept. of State advisor on Latin American labor Benjamin S. Stephansky to Amembassy (Rio), Despatch no. 1025, 17 Mar. 1959; Geneva to the Secretary of State, Despatch no.

Frustrated by these developments, U.S. labor operatives refocused their attention on restoring U.S. trainees like Duran to the presidency of the São Paulo federation of metalworkers. In this effort, however, they ran afoul of the Brazilian labor ministry. Federation leaders were elected on 5 December 1959, and a slate including two recipients of Point Four grants won narrowly over a slate led by incumbent president Waldimir Schnor, allegedly a member of the Communist Party. According to Brazilian labor law, each local union within a category has one vote for federation officers regardless of the size of its membership. Thus the nineteen locals in the state split, with the delegates of the smaller unions located in interior cities such as Santos, Ribeirão Preto, and Piracicaba voting for the pro-U.S. slate.⁵² Furious with the results, Schnor and Bostos of the large São Paulo city local reportedly accused the winning slate of fraud and asked the labor ministry to void the results and supervise a new election. Labor Minister Gilberto Crockett de Sá complied with the request, invalidating the election and scheduling a new one for March 1960.⁵³

U.S. labor officials were livid, but their troubles with the ministry had just begun. The next dispute involved the ministry's desire for veto power over the selection of labor leaders being considered for Point Four grants. Up to that time, selection of trainees depended on the recommendation of the U.S. labor attaché and the approval of Romualdi (or another ORIT official) and Dr. João Guilherme de Aragão, the Brazilian government's Point Four representative. Now the ministry wanted to write new regulations requiring its approval for prospective candidates. The dispute ended only when it became clear that no new funds had been appropriated for travel grants in 1960.⁵⁴ This incident as well as the ministry's intervention in the metalworkers' election revealed increasing tension between Brazilian and U.S. labor officials.

For much of the 1950s, the labor ministry had been influenced by João Goulart, a leader of the PTB from Rio Grande do Sul who served as labor minister in 1953 and was elected vice president of Brazil in 1955 and again in 1960. In September 1961, he became president when President Jânio Quadros suddenly resigned. Although Goulart had never been accused of being a communist by U.S. labor policymakers, they nonetheless

1189, 24 Mar. 1959; Stephansky to Amembassy (Rio), telegram no. 870, 9 Apr. 1959; and Herter to Amembassy, telegram, 10 Apr. 1959, all in RG 59, DF 832.062, Dept. of State, USNA.

52. Shea to Dept. of State, "Communist Setback in Metalworker Elections," Despatch no. 198, 7 Dec. 1959, RG 59, DF 832.062, Dept. of State, USNA. The Point Four trainees were Argeu Egídio dos Santos, president of the Ribeirão Preto local, and Jaime Cunha Caldeira, president of the Piracicaba local. Both were elected to the new federation executive board.

53. Shea to Dept. of State, "Metalworkers' Elections Annulled by Minister of Labor," Despatch no. 225, 21 Dec. 1959, RG 59, DF 832.062, Dept. of State, USNA. Currently available documents do not reveal the results of the second election.

54. Shea to Howard H. Cottam, Minister of Economic Affairs at the American Embassy in Rio, Stephansky, and U.S. labor attaché John T. Fishburn, memorandum, 31 Dec. 1959, RG 59, DF 832.062, Dept. of State, USNA.



Illustration 1 Brazilian workers enthusiastically supported revolutionary Cuba, much to the dismay of U.S. policymakers.



Illustration 2 Although the United States sought to build “business unions” in Brazil, few Brazilian workers heeded the call, as suggested by this May Day rally against hunger and unemployment. Photos provided by John French, courtesy of the Sindicato dos Metalúrgicos de Santo André, Mauá, Ribeirão Pires, e Rio Grande da Serra.

viewed him with suspicion. In the eyes of these U.S. officials, Goulart was the worst sort of "fellow traveler," one who allied with communists when it suited his political needs. For example, in intervening in the metalworkers' election, Goulart undoubtedly hoped to appease the powerful São Paulo local with its communist leadership and large membership. Goulart's own sympathies (like those of the Brazilian population in general) were nationalistic. Thus as left-nationalist strength increased during the economic crisis of the late 1950s and early 1960s, Goulart and the labor ministry found it more difficult to confront communists in the labor movement (Benevides 1989; Bandeira 1983).

In a complex and confusing series of events occurring between mid-1960 and mid-1962, the United States lost its fingerhold on the Brazilian labor movement as the influence of left-nationalists (with whom Goulart was more or less aligned) increased dramatically.⁵⁵ The first sign of slippage came in August 1960, at the Third National Labor Congress held in Rio de Janeiro. A serious split widened over establishing a single and central labor federation in Brazil. The leftists favored the idea, but influential labor officers like the first U.S. labor ally, CNTI president Deocleciano Hollanda de Cavalcanti, opposed the idea. (Ironically, Romualdi had pressured Brazilian labor leaders, including Cavalcanti, to establish an AFL-like central fourteen years earlier in 1946.) Frustrated with their minority position, Cavalcanti led a dramatic walkout from the congress, taking forty-five of twenty-five hundred delegates with him (Harding 1960; Delgado 1986, 41–43).

As it turned out, this maneuver served only to isolate the Cavalcanti faction. In July 1961, Cavalcanti lost the presidency of the CNTI to Clodsmidt Riani, an independent-leftist union leader from Minas Gerais and an organizer of the third congress. That congress agreed to table the idea of establishing a central, but at a fourth congress held in August 1962, thirty-five hundred delegates from almost six hundred unions created the Comando Geral dos Trabalhadores (CGT) without opposition (Delgado 1986, 54–56). Riani became president of the CGT, while communist union officers Hércules Correa and Luis Tenório de Lima were elected to its board. This outcome dealt U.S. labor policy a serious setback. Moreover, the Brazilian labor minister, although far from happy with the growing autonomy of the labor movement, decided to tolerate the CGT rather than repress this extralegal body.

Thus after more than a decade of operation, the ORIT Point Four training program for Brazilian unionists came to a disappointing halt in the early 1960s. Several trainees had been ousted from their unions, and other leaders abhorred by U.S. officials had been elevated to positions of leadership. Ironically, the CGT remained largely free of government con-

55. Interview with Fishburn, 27 Apr. 1985.

trol and included demands for trade-union autonomy and collective bargaining as platform planks, all objectives of U.S. free trade-union policy. Yet the CGT's anti-imperialist, nationalist stance made it a symbol of U.S. failure rather than success. By 1962, promoting the U.S. point of view had become a difficult task indeed.

AIFLD: INTERVENTION AND CONTROL, 1962–1965

While it is tempting to claim that U.S. labor policy shifted radically after 1962, such an interpretation conflicts with the documentation available. Beginning in 1946, U.S. labor officials willingly served and helped shape U.S. foreign policy in Brazil, forming a partnership with the government that continued into the early 1960s. What changed somewhat was U.S. foreign policy. The administration of President John Kennedy was pressing the U.S. Foreign Service to become more aggressive and activist in its work abroad, and labor policy reflected this general trend. By 1964 U.S. labor policy tactics were carried by overall policy to the extreme of helping overthrow the legally constituted government of President Goulart. In the aftermath of the April coup d'état, U.S. labor again collaborated with U.S. officials in helping build a solid foothold for what proved to be a repressive and authoritarian government. The new government quickly proved to be the antithesis of the vital democracy called for by free trade-union ideology (Leacock 1990).

U.S. involvement in the labor movement had long been a means of covertly influencing Brazilian politics. In 1962 this approach took a more refined and concentrated form when the American Institute for Free Labor Development (AIFLD) set up operations in Recife and São Paulo. Although directed by officers of the AFL-CIO, AIFLD was a product of the reassessment of international labor activities carried out by the administration of President Dwight Eisenhower. A study conducted toward the end of his second term concluded, "The Department of State, Labor and Defense are deeply involved in international labor matters as are ICA, USIA and CIA." But according to the study, the lines of authority between these agencies were "obscure" and required "improved direction and coordination." The labor department recommended establishing an interagency labor advisory committee to coordinate operations.⁵⁶ In May 1961, Eisenhower's successor followed the study's recommendations. Kennedy also asked Labor Secretary Arthur Goldberg to make particular arrangements for Latin American labor in the context of the newly estab-

56. "A Proposal regarding Administration of International Labor Affairs within the U.S. Government," an unsigned confidential memorandum dated 31 Feb. 1961. Enclosed in Undersecretary of Labor W. Willard Wirtz to Undersecretary of State George W. Ball, 28 Feb. 1961, RG 174, box 61, Dept. of Labor, Records of Secretary of Labor Arthur J. Goldberg, USNA. Cited hereafter as Goldberg Records.

lished Alliance for Progress. In response, a special labor advisory committee for the region was set up, and in August 1962, AIFLD was chartered as part of this collaborative effort.⁵⁷

The Labor Advisory Committee for the Alliance for Progress met for the second time on 12 March 1962. AFL-CIO President George Meany had been named chairman, and members included AIFLD Executive Director William Doherty, Jr., Romualdi, AIFLD Secretary-Treasurer Joseph Beirne, Central Intelligence Agency Director Thomas McCone, Agency for International Development Administrator Fowler Hamilton, Secretary of State Dean Rusk, and Secretary of Labor Goldberg himself. Everyone attended the meeting except Rusk, who sent an assistant secretary. It was decided that AIFLD would "contract directly with the Agency for International Development (AID) to carry out [the advisory committee's] projects in Latin America." This decision was made, Beirne later claimed, because "the private and non-governmental character of the institute" would enable AIFLD to develop programs "which as a result of diplomatic and political conditions may not be undertaken directly by the U.S. Government."⁵⁸ In other words, AIFLD was to be an undercover instrument of U.S. foreign policy, guided in part by the CIA. Goldberg further underscored this point in a letter to Beirne, reiterating that all AIFLD projects, whether funded by the government or not, were subject to review by the Labor Advisory Committee.⁵⁹

AIFLD established propaganda and training institutes in Brazil at the end of 1962, including the Instituto Cultural do Trabalho (ICT) in São Paulo. In addition to identifying candidates for travel to AIFLD's training program in Washington, the ICT sponsored a number of studies of the Brazilian labor movement, leadership, and structure under the direction of J. V. Freitas Marcondes, a Brazilian sociologist trained at the University of Florida. U.S. attention was also focused on continuing the labor leader training program, and in January 1963, the first class of Brazilians arrived in Washington for a six-month stay under AIFLD guidance. Like their predecessors under the ORIT Point Four programs, the thirty-three trainees studied U.S. labor history, economics, structures, and techniques for identifying and defending themselves and their unions against communists and fascists.⁶⁰

57. Goldberg to Kennedy, "Labor Program for Latin America," 17 Nov. 1961, RG 174, box 114; and Goldberg to AID administrator Fowler Hamilton, 29 Nov. 1961, RG 174, box 113, both in Goldberg Records, Dept. of Labor, USNA.

58. Beirne to Hamilton, 26 Apr. 1962, RG 174, box 45, Goldberg Records, Dept. of Labor, USNA.

59. Goldberg to Beirne, 7 May 1962, RG 174, Box 45, Goldberg Records, Dept. of Labor, USNA.

60. "Academic Program of the Institute," American Institute for Free Labor Development, an enclosure in Romualdi to Goldberg, 27 July 1962, RG 174, box 37, Goldberg Records; and Romualdi to Wirtz, 26 Nov. 1962, RG 174, box 12, Records of Secretary of Labor W. Willard Wirtz, both in Dept. of Labor, USNA. Hereafter cited as Wirtz Records.

Yet no matter how much more efficiently such programs were run, they had only limited impact on the labor movement. As one of the ICT's own studies showed, shortly before the coup d'état, many labor leaders were unimpressed by the promise of U.S. trade-union ideology, unconcerned about communism, and supportive of the CGT. When some eighty union officials were asked if they found a labor central like the CGT "necessary," forty-four answered "yes," twenty-two said "no," and twelve did not reply. Only five considered as necessary the rival União Sindical dos Trabalhadores (recently established by Cavalcanti with U.S. backing). When asked what "forces" most prohibited Brazil's economic development, eighteen faulted "retrograde capitalism," fourteen the "ignorance and laziness of workers," twelve complained about "political groups," and eleven cast the blame on communism (Marcondes 1964, 79–81). Clearly, by 1964 the U.S. point of view still had not been put forward successfully.

The idea of overthrowing President Goulart did not originate with U.S. labor policymakers, but their impatience with the training program and their frustration with his administration led them to spend little time pondering the ethics and morality of participating in the overthrow of a legitimate government. Fishburn, for example, noted that the labor ministry under Goulart was "absolutely impossible" to deal with and that U.S. efforts were in a "retreat mode." Until he left Brazil in 1963, Fishburn, an unidentified CIA officer at the embassy, and special envoy Colonel Vernon Walters lobbied U.S. Ambassador Lincoln Gordon to support the budding *golpe*.⁶¹ According to AIFLD Director Doherty, the institute's trainees were "intimately involved" in the military and civilian conspiracy against President Goulart. Exactly what they did remains unclear, but it seems unlikely that their role was as central as Doherty claimed (Doherty 1974; Agee 1974, 244–47). Reportedly, AIFLD trainees helped the conspirators by keeping communication links open to the military and closed to Goulart's defenders. This may have been the case in São Paulo and Recife, where AIFLD had an institutional presence, but in Rio, forces supporting Goulart and his government claim to have taken command of most local television and radio stations (Spalding 1988, 20; Leacock 1990, 210). Whatever AIFLD's role, Doherty's boast certainly projects a contradictory image of the democratic core of free trade unionism.

After the coup, AIFLD graduates helped take control of Brazilian unions from which suspected leftist leaders had been purged, thereby helping the new government establish greater influence over organized labor (Spalding 1988, 20; Methvin 1966, 28). Such contradictions between theory and practice strained relations among U.S. policymakers. In May 1964, Victor Reuther, director of the International Affairs Department of the United Auto Workers, raised questions about the ethics of labor's role

61. Interview with Fishburn, 27 Apr. 1985.

in Brazil at the first meeting of the Labor Advisory Committee after the coup. Attending in an *ex officio* capacity, Reuther listened to the reports about the doubling of AIFLD activities in Brazil and the operatives' "frequent consultation with Ambassador Gordon, labor minister Sussekind, and labor attaché Baker." AFL-CIO inter-American representative Andrew McLellan defended the Brazilian government's practice of intervening in the unions as "necessary to provide continuity in the legal counseling and social welfare services" offered by the unions. The labor ministry had scheduled a labor "symposium" for 8 June that, in McLellan's words, promised to "result in the establishment of a new democratically oriented trade-union movement." At long last, the institutional structure of U.S. labor system was coming to Brazil.⁶²

Reuther seemed less impressed by this course of events than the rest of the committee. He questioned whether a conference run by the government was really a sign of democracy. Was it the right of the Brazilian government, he asked, "to in effect determine the eligibility of candidates for union office at the June 8 symposium?" Others present discussed the question but explained that the Brazilian government had always interfered in the unions and controlled them. It was then determined that the United States should do nothing "to jeopardize the prospects of a free democratic labor movement emerging in Brazil." In that regard, the committee "could not and should not give its approval to the procedures now being applied to unions in Brazil." Reuther also asked about the arrest of CGT president Clodsmidt Riani, suggesting that a controversy over his incarceration could arise at an upcoming ILO meeting. On this matter, the committee decided to prepare U.S. and Latin American government and worker delegates to sidetrack debate over Riani's arrest by claiming that it was a criminal rather than a labor matter because Riani had been charged under penal law.⁶³

Thus by 1965, the *laissez faire* attitude of U.S. policymakers toward Brazilian military rule allowed them to justify attaching the future of free trade unions to the development of authoritarianism. But as the questions raised by Reuther suggest, some individuals within the U.S. labor movement were becoming increasingly uncomfortable with the contradictions of such a policy. A serious rift developed within the labor movement as a result of these contradictions and those generated by similar activities in other Latin American countries, Africa, and Asia (Reuther 1966; Windmuller 1967; Radosh 1969; and Spalding 1992–1993). In Brazil, however, two decades of U.S. labor policy had established a pattern of relations that would continue into the 1990s, with the United States trying

62. "Labor Advisory Committee on Foreign Assistance," minutes of meeting on 26 May 1964, AFL-CIO Bldg., Washington, D.C., RG 174, box 159, Wirtz Records, Dept. of Labor, USNA.

63. *Ibid.*

to implant free trade-union structures there and the Brazilians—from government officials to labor leaders and the working class—going about their business in ways that often defied the best-laid U.S. plans.

CONCLUSION

As has been shown in this brief review of the first two decades of U.S. involvement in the Brazilian labor movement, Brazilian institutions demonstrated considerable autonomy vis-à-vis U.S. efforts. What seems abundantly clear is Brazilian labor's resilience in the face of pressure from the Brazilian state as well as from U.S. operatives. My research suggests that Brazilian unions remained substantially dependent on the state during most of this period, corroborating the opinion of scholars who stress the lack of trade-union autonomy in Brazil under populism (Epstein 1989; Cohen 1989; Weffort 1978). Yet it seems more accurate to echo Maria Helena Moreira Alves's conclusion that until the 1964 golpe, Brazilian unions "organized in a climate of tolerated freedom, something that ought not be confused with structurally based autonomy" (Alves 1989, 45). Indeed, most of the evidence shows that union members exercised considerable freedom in rejecting officers favored by the United States and electing slates that lacked the support of the Brazilian government. Moreover, the government did not always abide by U.S. wishes. More often than not, Brazilian imperatives from the grass roots upward determined the shape of events.

The Brazilian case also offers evidence for modifying the traditional portrayal of U.S. labor policy in Latin America. The literature has stressed that anticommunism was the heart and soul of policy during most of the cold war period (Berger 1966, 1990; Radosh 1969; Hirsch 1974). Only in the 1980s, analysts argue, did alternative voices within the U.S. labor movement become more effective (Buchanan 1991; Spalding 1992–1993). In a large country like Brazil, however, the ruling class needed little help in suppressing those who threatened the status quo. Although U.S. labor operatives generally collaborated in these efforts, much energy was also devoted to sincere if ineffective efforts to "Americanize" the trade-union culture of Brazil. Fighting communism was justified not as an end in itself but as a means of laying the groundwork for implanting "free trade unionism" and free market democracy. Those who care about labor internationalism today would do well to recognize the two-sided nature of this policy historically as well as the distortions that occurred when its proponents failed to pay greater attention to locally defined needs.

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