PART ONE

POLITICS

1

POLITICS IN BRAZIL UNDER VARGAS, 1930–1945

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INTRODUCTION

The fifteen years between the Revolution of October–November 1930 that brought the First Republic (1889–1930) to an end and the military coup of October 1945 that ended the Estado Novo (1937–1945), a period dominated by Getúlio Vargas who was president throughout, were a watershed in the political, economic and social history of Brazil.

In his classic *A Revolução de 1930: historiografia e história* (São Paulo, 1970) Boris Fausto effectively demolished the view, prevalent in the 1960s, that the Revolution of 1930 represented the definitive end of the hegemony of the coffee-producing bourgeoisie of São Paulo and the rise to power of the industrial bourgeoisie and the urban middle classes. The conflict in 1930 was interregional, interoligarchical and, not least, intergenerational rather than intersectoral, much less interclass. The Revolution began on 3 October 1930 with an armed rebellion by dissident members of the political elite, especially in the states of Rio Grande do Sul and Minas Gerais but also in the Northeast, and disaffected army officers, unwilling to accept the victory of the 'official' candidate, Júlio Prestes, the representative of the landed oligarchy of São Paulo, in the presidential elections of March 1930. The rebellion triggered a *golpe* (military coup) on 24 October by senior army generals who removed President Washington Luís Pereira de Sousa from office. On 3 November the military transferred power to the defeated candidate in the March elections and leader of the rebellion, the governor of Rio Grande do Sul, Getúlio Vargas. Although there was a certain amount of popular discontent at the time, particularly as the first effects of the World Depression of 1928–1933 began to be felt, popular forces played only a minor role in the Revolution. What Louis Couty, a French resident in Rio de Janeiro, had famously written almost fifty years earlier remained

essentially true: 'Brazil has no people', that is to say, no popular forces that could be effectively mobilised for significant regime change.

The Revolution of 1930, however, proved to be more than simply a shift in the balance of power between landed regional elites, and in particular the arrival in power of the *gaúchos* (as the inhabitants of the southern state of Rio Grande do Sul are called) for the first time in the federal capital, Rio de Janeiro. The change of political regime brought a centralisation of power, an expansion of the federal state at the expense of state autonomy and a weakening of the state oligarchies; an end to liberal constitutionalism and representative government, only briefly restored in 1934, leading after 1937 to an outright authoritarian dictatorship; and a federal army greatly strengthened at the expence of the state militias and firmly established at the centre of power, where it remained for more than half a century. And unlike the political transition from Portuguese colony to independent Empire in 1822 and from Empire to Republic in 1889, both of which were marked by social and economic continuity, the new regime installed in 1930 initiated significant economic and social change. There was no sudden break with the past. Many of the economic and social changes had their origins in the period after the First World War, some even in the late nineteenth century. But in the period beginning with the Revolution of 1930, coinciding with World Depression, and especially after the establishment of the Estado Novo in 1937, which was in turn profoundly affected by the Second World War, Brazil experienced the beginnings of state-led economic development and industrial growth, while continuing to be heavily dependent on agricultural exports, especially coffee, and witnessed the growing importance of new, predominantly urban, social groups (administrators, industrialists, the professional and commercial middle class, and white-collar and industrial workers in both the public and the private sectors).

THE REVOLUTION OF 1930

The Political System of the First Republic[1]

The political system of the First Republic, which entered its final phase with the presidential succession crisis of 1929–1930, was based on the

[1] For a more detailed analysis of the political system of the First Republic than is presented here, see Boris Fausto, 'Brazil: the social and political structure of the First Republic, 1889–1930', in Leslie Bethell (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Latin America*, volume V *c. 1870–1930* (Cambridge, 1986).

Constitution of 1891, promulgated while Brazil was still under military rule following the overthrow of Emperor Dom Pedro II in November 1889. Under the political system of the Empire, which had preserved the unity of a huge, poorly integrated country with a population of only 10 million in 1872 and with little sense of national identity, power had been centralised in the hands of an hereditary Emperor and the ministers, counsellors of state (for life) and presidents of provinces he appointed. In 1891 Brazil became a decentralised federal republic somewhat on the model of the United States. A great deal of power was devolved to twenty states (the former provinces of the Empire) which, for example, had the right to raise taxes on exports and secure external loans and to maintain state military police forces that were virtually state armies, often bigger and better equipped than the local federal armed forces.

Under the Empire, only the lower house of the Parliament, the Chamber of Deputies, was elected. Under the Republic the president and the governors of the states, as well as both houses of Congress (Chamber of Deputies and Senate) and state assemblies, were elected (in theory freely elected by, and responsible to, those they governed). The level of political participation in the electoral process under the Republic, however, was very limited – in some respects even more so than during the Empire (at least until 1881). In the first place, voting was restricted to men over the age of twenty-one, with the exception of the rank and file of the armed forces and members of religious orders. Although the Constitution of 1891 had not *explicitly* denied women the vote and there were some isolated attempts to register women voters – for example, in Rio Grande do Norte in the late 1920s – in practice women did not vote. Secondly, although income or property requirements for voting had been abolished by one of the first decrees of the provisional republican government in November 1889, the Constitution of 1891 confirmed a new requirement for new voter registration introduced for the first time by the *Lei Saraiva* (1881) at the end of the Empire: namely, education as measured by a literacy test, or rather the capacity to sign one's name – in a country in which 85 percent of the population was illiterate. In the Constituent Assembly a greater effort had been made to extend the suffrage to women than to illiterates. And such was the neglect of public primary and secondary education – the principal instrument for the construction of civil and political citizenship – during the First Republic, responsibility for which had been devolved to the states, that as late as the Census of 1920 less than 25 percent of Brazil's population (which had grown by now to some thirty million) was literate. Less than

one million literate adult males therefore had the right to vote. No political campaign was ever mounted during the First Republic in support of a greater level of popular political participation.

Since neither registration to vote by those eligible to vote nor voting itself was obligatory, the numbers voting in elections during the First Republic was extremely low. Before 1930, even in the most competitive elections with the highest level of political mobilisation – for example, the presidential elections of 1910, 1919 and 1922 – no more than 5 percent of the adult population ever voted in an election. Even in the city of Rio de Janeiro, the capital of the Republic, with a population of half a million in the early part of the twentieth century, including an emerging urban middle class and the beginnings of an urban working class, only about 100,000 had the right to vote. Of these, only 25–35 percent registered to vote in elections between 1890 and 1910, and only between 7 and 13 percent (5–10 percent of the total adult population) actually voted.[2]

In 1890 less than 10 percent of Brazil's population could be classified as urban, that is to say, living in cities of more than 20,000 inhabitants, and no less than one third of the total urban population was concentrated in the Federal District. By 1920, when Rio de Janeiro had one million inhabitants, São Paulo, growing even faster than Rio, half a million, and there were another ten cities with populations of more than 100,000, the urban population was still only around 15 percent of the total population. Compared with Argentina, for example, both the urban middle class – in the liberal professions, commerce and the bureaucracy – and the skilled (and literate) working class – in public utilities, railways and other means of transport, ports, banks, the construction industry, commerce and the manufacturing industry, mostly textiles and the processing of food and drink – were relatively small. The bulk of the urban population consisted of artisans, unskilled manual workers and domestic servants, many of them ex-slaves or descendants of slaves. (The institution of slavery, which although heavily concentrated in plantation agriculture had permeated all sections of Brazilian society, rural and urban, had only finally been abolished eighteen months before the proclamation of the Republic.) Throughout the period of the First Republic 65–70 percent of economically active Brazilians were employed in agriculture, cattle-raising and rural industries and lived in small towns and in the countryside where, since neither the transition

[2] José Murilo de Carvalho, *Os bestializados: o Rio de Janeiro e a república que não foi* (São Paulo, 1987), chapter 3.

from colony to Empire in 1822 nor the transition from Empire to Republic in 1889 had disturbed the existing pattern of land ownership, productive resources, and especially land, were highly concentrated in the hands of a relatively few families in each state.

Elections for governor, state assembly and both houses of Congress were for the most part controlled in each state of the federation by a single statewide Republican party – the Partido Republicano Paulista (PRP), the Partido Republicano Mineiro (PRM), the Partido Republicano Riograndense (PRR) and so forth – which united the majority of the dominant landed families. There were always dissident factions, of course, and in Rio Grande do Sul, for example, competing political parties: the Partido Federalista (the former Liberals of the Empire) and, from 1908, the Partido Republicano Democrático (later Aliança Libertadora). With relatively few voters, no secret ballot, and no system of electoral supervision, the exercise of patronage through a complex system of clientelism, intimidation and, where necessary, violence, and outright fraud were widespread, especially in the more backward states of the Northeast and North, but also, though less so, in the more developed Southeast and South (and even to some extent in the cities). Since most Brazilians were extremely poor and lived without any form of social protection, those who had the vote were inclined to exchange it for food, cash and jobs. Local political bosses known as *coroneis* (because many had once had the rank of colonel in the National Guard) who, if they were not landowners themselves, broadly speaking protected the interests of the local landowners, often with what amounted to private armies, delivered votes to the candidates in return for federal, state and municipal appointments for themselves, their relatives and their friends. Elections in Brazil had more to do with public demonstrations of personal loyalties, the offer and acceptance of patronage, the resolution of local (and regional) conflicts without resource to violence and, above all, control of a patrimonial state and the use of public power for private interests than with the exercise of power by the people in choosing and bringing to account those who governed them.

After the military, which provided the First Republic with its first two presidents – Marshals Manoel Deodoro da Fonseca and Floriano Peixoto – largely withdrew from politics in 1894, presidents of the Republic were elected in a nationwide poll every four years (with no reelection permitted) and all except one were civilians. Presidential elections were, however, for the most part predetermined by prior agreement between the state governors (representatives of the state oligarchies) in a process which came

to be known as *a política dos governadores* (the politics of the governors). The process was dominated by the two states – São Paulo and, after it had solved some internal political conflicts in the early years of the Republic, Minas Gerais. They had the most cohesive Republican parties and the most powerful state militias; between them they were responsible for over half Brazil's agricultural and, if the Federal District – Rio de Janeiro – is excluded, industrial production; together they had 40 percent of the electorate. The first three civilian presidents elected in 1894, 1898 and 1902 were all *paulistas*, representatives of the São Paulo coffee oligarchy. The presidency was then largely shared between São Paulo and Minas Gerais. Of the eight presidential elections contested between 1906 and 1930, three were won by *paulistas*, and three by *mineiros*.

Usually the state presidents and state oligarchies of São Paulo and Minas Gerais agreed on an 'official' candidate, and the other states, most importantly Bahia, Pernambuco, Rio de Janeiro and, once it, too, had resolved its internal conflicts, Rio Grande do Sul, fourth after Bahia in population but third in the number of literate male adults and therefore voters, fell into line. In 1909–1910, however, when they could not agree on a candidate, Minister of War Marshal Hermes da Fonseca, nephew of Deodoro, though not a candidate of the military as an institution, emerged as a compromise and was elected. In 1917–1918 they agreed on former president Francisco de Paula Rodrigues Alves, a *paulista*, but Alves died in January 1919 and, because vice-president Delfim Moreira was incapacitated, new elections were held in April and, with São Paulo and Minas Gerais no longer in agreement, another compromise candidate, Senator Epitácio Pessoa of Paraíba, backed by Rio Grande do Sul and the states of Northeast, was elected. Pessoa was the first and only northeastener to become president during the First Republic. Divisions between São Paulo and Minas Gerais over the presidency in 1910 and 1919 provided an opportunity for the election to be more vigorously contested not only by dissident oligarchical groups in a number of states but also by Rui Barbosa, the great liberal jurist, standing as a *civilista* opposition candidate and mobilising the urban, professional middle class in particular (and some workers) in favour of political reform, clean elections, and the protection of civil liberties. In 1919 Rui secured a third of the national vote, and won in the Federal District.

In 1921–1922 the presidents of São Paulo and Minas Gerais, under the existing rules of the game, though the Republican party in each state was split internally, agreed that Artur Bernardes, a *mineiro*, would be their joint candidate. However, for the first time, they faced the united opposition

of all four 'second-level' states – Rio Grande do Sul (though itself divided with the PRR opposed by the both the Partido Federalista and the Aliança Libertadora), Bahia, Pernambuco and Rio de Janeiro. These states, along with dissidents in São Paulo and Minas Gerais, supported Nilo Peçanha, senator for the state of Rio de Janeiro, who had served as interim president in 1909–1910 following the death in office of the *mineiro* Afonso Pena. And on this occasion elements in the military led by ex-president Hermes da Fonseca, now President of the Clube Militar, joined what became known as the *Reação Republicana* against the '*o imperialismo dos grandes estados* (the imperialism of the big states)'. The election of March 1922 produced the highest turn out in a presidential election thus far (almost 800,000 voters), and the lowest winning margin (466,000 to 318,000). Bernades did, however, win. No 'official' candidate ever lost a presidential election during the First Republic.

For the first time since the early days of the Republic the military, though weak and fragmented (despite some improvements introduced by the French military mission in 1920), had played a significant political role in the presidential crisis of 1921–1922. Of greater significance for the immediate future, however, was the emergence at this time of a 'movement' of young (and not so young) junior army officers (mostly lieutenants, hence know as *tenentes*), who were openly critical of the military high command and both the political system and the economic and social structures of the Republic. They criticised their seniors for having been co-opted and manipulated by Brazil's corrupt political elites who put regional before national interests and loyalties. They complained about the army's poor organisation, training and equipment – and its size, particularly relative to the state militias of the richer states. In 1921 the federal army and the state militias as a whole each had 29,000 officers and men, but one-quarter to one-third of the federal army was based in one state, Rio Grande do Sul. The *tenentes* also complained about the slow rate of promotion in the Brazilian army: two-thirds of the officer corps was second or first lieutenants; some second lieutenants waited fifteen to twenty years for promotion. Their ideology, if that is not too grand a term for what became known after the Revolution of 1930 as *tenentismo* (see, for example, Virgílio Santa Rosa, *O sentido do tenentismo*, 1932), was vaguely nationalist (the *tenentes* were greatly influenced by an organisation called *A Defesa Nacional* founded in 1913 and by Alberto Torres' classic works, *O problemo nacional brasileiro* and *A organização nacional*, both published in Rio de Janeiro in 1914). They favoured the centralisation of power in the hands of an

enlightened technocratic military and civilian elite (the *tenentes* were not liberals and, opposed to universal suffrage, certainly not democrats) and an interventionist state, which were necessary conditions both for the reform of the military as an institution and for national economic development and an end to foreign capitalist exploitation of Brazil. They also argued in favour of agrarian reform and of social reform more generally in order to combat the poverty and ignorance of the majority of Brazilians.

Some *tenentes* were openly rebellious and engaged in a series of armed revolts, all of which eventually put down by loyalist troops: the first in July 1922 at the Copacabana Fort in Rio de Janeiro; two years later, on 5 July 1924, in São Paulo, led by Major Miguel Costa, the commander of the Força Pública, the state military police; finally, in October 1924 in Rio Grande do Sul led by a 26-year-old *gaúcho* army captain Luís Carlos Prestes, the future leader of the Brazilian Communist Party. Several hundred survivors of all three rebellions joined forces at Foz de Iguassú in April 1925. Costa and Prestes became commanders of what became known as the Prestes Column, which set off on a 24,000 kilometre 'Long March' through thirteen states in protest against the Bernardes administration and the state governors and state oligarchies supporting it. The army and state militias, their morale undermined, were reluctant to confront the Column because so many lieutenants, captains and majors were sympathetic to it, but it was finally defeated in February–March 1927 and dispersed to Bolivia and Paraguay. Many of its leaders, including Costa and Prestes, went into exile in Buenos Aires.

In the meantime, it was business as usual in the run-up to the 1926 presidential election. São Paulo and Minas Gerais supported Washington Luís Pereira de Sousa, the outgoing governor of São Paulo, but this time, unlike 1922, with the agreement of Rio Grande do Sul and all of the other states. Unopposed, *candidato único*, Washinton Luís was elected in March and became president in November – curiously, for the reasons we have seen, the first representative of the state of São Paulo to serve as president since Rodrigues Alves (1902–1906).[3] However, opposition, both generational and ideological, *within* the Republican parties of the more important states was even more evident in 1926 than in 1922. Following the conflict *between* the states in 1922, it was perhaps a further indication of a deepening crisis in the political system of the First Republic. In São

[3] Washington Luís was not in fact a *paulista* by birth; he was a '*paulista de Macaé*', born in the state of Rio de Janeiro.

Paulo, in February 1926, the PRR had actually split with the creation of a Partido Democrático (PD). And after the election a Partido Democrático was established in the Federal District (in May 1927) and a number of other states, notably Bahia and Pernambuco. Between July and September 1927 a loosely organisd Partido Democrático Nacional (PDN) was formed.

The Presidential Succession 1929–1930

The issue of the presidential succession in 1930 once again strained the *política dos governadores*. President Washington Luís chose as his candidate, and therefore in effect his successor, Júlio Prestes de Albuquerque, who had succeeded him as governor of São Paulo in 1926. The aim was to consolidate the political as well as the economic hegemony of São Paulo, and maintain continuity of economic policy as Brazil, and particularly the coffee sector of São Paulo, began to feel the effects of the World Depression. In this he was supported by the coffee bourgeoisie, the industrial interests represented by the Centro de Indústrias do Estado de São Paulo and by important sections of the urban middle class united in the Partido Republicano Paulista (PRP) as well as by the Centro Industrial do Brasil in Rio de Janeiro and some agricultural and industrial interests in Minas Gerais. But in breaking the rules of the game and putting at risk the traditional agreement by which power alternated between São Paulo and Minas Gerais it is clear, with hindsight, that Washington Luís he made a disastrous mistake.

The governor of Minas Gerais, Antônio Carlos Ribeiro de Andrada, two former *mineiro* presidents, Wenceslau Brás and Artur Bernardes, and the traditional political families of Minas Gerais united in the Partido Republicano Mineiro (PRM) opposed Washington Luís's choice of Prestes as 'official' candidate for the presidency. To secure the support of Rio Grande do Sul, Antônio Carlos proposed in June that, instead of a *mineiro* candidate (most likely himself), the governor of Rio Grande do Sul, Getúlio Vargas, should be the 'opposition' candidate. In July, seeing an opportunity to capture the presidency for the first time, the political leaders of Rio Grande do Sul – Raul Pilla of the Partido Federalista and Joaquim Francisco de Assis Brasil of the Aliança Libertadora (who had in March 1928 joined forces in a Partido Libertador [PL]), and Antônio Augusto Borges de Medeiros of the Partido Republicano Riograndense (PRR) – formed a united front, the Frente Única Gaúcha (FUG), behind the candidacy of Vargas. Particularly enthusiastic about the decision of the PRM, the PRR and the PL to oppose the Prestes candidacy was a younger, better educated,