

**The Organization of Rural Life:
Getúlio Vargas and the Transformation of Rural Social Relations**

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Many scholars have noted the durability of policies initiated by Brazil's grandest twentieth century political figure, Getúlio Vargas. From social welfare to corporate welfare, from military service to foreign service, from bureaucratic-authoritarianism to democratization, Vargas shaped the basic features of Brazil's modern political economy. Vargas rose to predominance through the Liberal Alliance in the 1920s, took over through a revolt in 1930, and solidified dictatorial powers in 1937. Ousted by a coup d'état in 1945, he was elected president in 1950 as leader of the Brazilian Labor Party (Partido Trabalhista Brasileiro-PTB). In 1954, on the verge of being toppled by another cabal, he committed suicide, bringing an end to his struggles, while leaving Brazil to wrestle over the meaning of his life and works.ⁱ

Vargas's influence on rural society, though little analyzed, was much like that of any other realm.ⁱⁱ In the context of the Great Depression, his regime responded to the apparent disorder of the agrarian sector, especially export commodities like coffee, and sought to reorganize it in subordinate relation to his vision of an urban, industrial Brazil. Perhaps more than in other areas, resistance was strong, commitment weak, allies hard to find, and progress slow. Yet Vargas did not accept the status quo, as many have alleged. From his first term in office to his last, Vargas supported plans to fundamentally alter rural social relations. As Linhares and Da Silva wrote in 1999, "a tese básica vigente em alguns estudos, de que Vargas intervinha no mundo urbano do trabalho e calava-se frente ao campo...deve ser revista à luz de pesquisas voltadas exatamente para o papel da agricultura e do campo na política geral varguista."ⁱⁱⁱ Consistent with those who emphasize his ruling class sensibilities—his designation as "Mother of the Rich"—he never bit the bullet to force radical change for the sector. But my research demonstrates that by the time of his ouster in 1945, Vargas had encouraged his

designation as “Father of the Poor” by initiating some studies, implementing some measures, and signing some decrees favoring rural workers that shaped much of the ensuing debate about the organization of rural society through the end of the 20th century. Thus, the essential parameters of the laws finally established in the early 1960s by the populist government of Vargas’s protégé, President João “Jango” Goulart, had actually been developed in the context of Vargas’s corporatist Estado Novo dictatorship. It goes without saying that the cross-purposes inherent in the authoritarian origins of these policies continued to both inspire and frustrate the hopes of many workers into the 21st century.^{iv}

Rural Life and the Vargas Revolt

The October 1930 revolt pitted Vargas against the long reigning rural oligarchy centered in the coffee and dairy industries of the states of São Paulo and Minas Gerais. Marking the movement’s relative populism, Vargas’s Liberal Alliance (AL) platform, announced 2 January 1930, included a section on “the social question” which recalled some of the radical proposals put forward by the Worker-Peasant Bloc, a popular front organized in the late 1920s by the Brazilian Communist Party (Partido Comunista Brasileiro–PCB). The platform claimed that an AL government would develop a labor code to serve both “the urban and rural proletariat,” and it suggested that the alliance would provide rural workers with improved educational, residential, nutritional, and health services. Vargas, like most of his colleagues in the alliance, was no common man, no *trabalhador rural*, but an elite, steeped in the patriarchal traditions of Brazil. A land holder, cattle rancher, lawyer, and former state governor of Rio Grande do Sul, he shrewdly gauged the party’s rhetoric to attract supporters to his cause and dilute the influence of both far right and left opponents.^v

Vargas brought a fresh perspective from his experiences Rio Grande do Sul. This southernmost state produced unique solutions to social dilemmas, the historian Joan Bak has persuasively argued. It produced a different political culture, one which looked to Italian corporatist models and saw benefits to enforcing cross-class cooperation, state intervention in the economy, and the creation of *sindicatos*--state-sanctioned economic interest groups, akin to trade unions, only organized to represent owners as well as workers and dependent upon government recognition to function legally. The *Riograndense* group that marched victoriously into Rio de Janeiro in October favored corporatism over both revolutionary communism and liberal capitalism, rejecting the class conflict model of the former and the individualism of the latter. As he occupied the presidential palace at Catete, Vargas advocated "the need for social and economic organization, collaboration of class organs in modern government and...a controlled economy purged of conflict and competition." Within five months of taking office, labor minister Lindolfo Collor issued the first decrees regarding the organization of *sindicatos*.^{vi}

The early Alliance platform also revealed the modernizing, developmentalist logic behind Vargas's later statements about rural workers. The coffee export economy of São Paulo, which fueled the national economy, had been devastated by the 1930 depression. To get it going again, the platform emphasized the control of production costs. To make coffee viable, planters needed cheap, efficient, and reliable labor. A shortage of "arms (*braços*)," as planters called workers, was one of the coffee economy's chronic problems. Contemporary conditions in Europe and Brazil made immigrant workers more costly to obtain and problematic to settle than in the past and Vargas emphasized the need to rely instead on Brazilian manpower. He also professed a desire to comply with labor relations standards established by the International Labor

Organization (ILO), for *his* Brazil aspired to be a member in good standing of the global community, and thus a more attractive recipient of foreign investment, with access to overseas markets. All of these influences added up to the conclusion that labor markets and the work process needed to be rationalized and that interventionist state regulation was the way to do it. As stated in the platform, Vargas promised labor policies "to initiate the valorization of human capital, for the measure of the social utility of man [was] given by his productive capacity."^{vii}

Increased productivity was the core of Vargas's interest in workers and incorporation was the means by which they would be made capable of working harder. For the hundreds of thousands of rural Brazilians who lived on the political margins, social legislation was the tool that would bring them in. He anticipated issuing labor legislation for all workers. "As for the urban worker, so too the rural stands in need of protective legal provisions, applicable to each type of worker, yet addressing the respective peculiarities of each." These thousands lived, according to Vargas, "without instruction, without good hygiene, poorly nourished and clothed, having contact with the state only through the high taxes they [were] forced to pay." Whether peasants or farm workers, Vargas like other contemporary rulers grouped all rural workers together as rural labor (*trabalho rural*), zeroing in on their labor-power rather than either their economic sector or their humanity. What was new under Vargas, however, was the emphasis he placed on the self-motivation of peasants and farm workers. He promised laws that would "awaken in them the interest, inculcating in them the habits of economic activity."^{viii} The novelty of this approach implied an unprecedented intervention in rural labor matters.

Plans for the creation of rural labor policy took shape soon after the rebels had taken over the Rio de Janeiro-based federal bureaucracy. Early in 1931, labor minister Collor articulated the

government's corporatist philosophy and sought the organization of rural labor syndicates.

"Appearing certain that agrarian syndicates of employees do not exist, it will be indispensable to promote the formation of some, in various states." Meeting in assembly with syndicates of agricultural employers, the two classes were to help design Brazil's farm policy. In the meantime, the labor ministry retained responsibility for regulating commercial and agricultural labor, for registering syndicates, for providing free legal assistance to rural and urban workers, for managing labor migration, and for overseeing homestead colonies established in frontier regions. By the end of 1931, the ministry had recognized 251 syndicates, six of them in the primary, agricultural sector. Only one more would be added by 1941, demonstrating the resistance of a fairly well-organized traditional elite.^{ix}

The government's attention to rural labor interests was partly motivated by the concerns and outlook of the most militant faction of the Alliance. This was the "lieutenants" (*tenentes*), a group composed primarily of junior military officers, some of whom had marched in protest against the status quo through the backlands of Brazil with Army Captain Luís Carlos Prestes—the celebrated "Horseman of Hope." Comrades-in-arms such as Miguel Costa, who led the march alongside Prestes, and João Alberto Lins de Barros adopted a pragmatic stance and broke with the ever more radical Prestes (who became leader of the PCB during Vargas's reign) in order to participate in Vargas's provisional government. They organized a debating society called the Clube 3 de Outubro and distinguished themselves as the only group within the new government disciplined enough to prepare a comprehensive program for restructuring Brazilian society. Addressing the problems of the agricultural economy, the lieutenants' program demanded that rural workers be granted the same series of rights and benefits proposed for urban

labor, such as minimum wages, compensation for unwarranted dismissal, and unions. The lieutenants also argued that rural workers deserved the right to share in both the profits and control of the plantations where they worked.^x

São Paulo became a test site for the *tenente* program. But fierce resistance ensued. In 1932, the state's coffee planter-dominated ruling class rebelled against the Vargas regime and 2,000 people died before peace negotiations led to a compromise that put off attempts to intervene in rural social relations for the remainder of the decade. Another series of confrontations, including an attempted PCB-led revolution in 1935, increased Fascist activity, and a threatening presidential campaign, caused Vargas to consolidate his power by establishing the Estado Novo dictatorship in 1937. For a variety of reasons—many related to the varied pressures of World War II—the early 1940s proved a propitious moment for Vargas to renew his effort to organize and incorporate rural society.

In May 1941, Vargas turned a spotlight on the "man of the country." Speaking at Rio de Janeiro's huge, Vasco da Gama soccer stadium, Vargas revealed his preoccupation with the problems of rural workers to the gathered crowd of urban workers, rural migrants, and a vast radio audience.

Our task is not yet finished. We have to confront, courageously, serious problems for the betterment of our people, in order that comfortable living conditions, education, and good hygiene shall not become the privileged situation of a few regions or zones. The benefits that you have conquered must be extended to rural workers, to those who, isolated in the backlands, live far from the advantages of civilization. Moreover, if we do not take this step, we will run the risk of stimulating the exodus of the countryside and the

overpopulation of our cities--causing an imbalance with unpredictable consequences, capable of diluting or annulling the effects of our campaign for the integral valorization of our people, to endow them of economic vigor, physical health, and productive energy.

Vargas was a clever orator. He spoke to the audience's sense of justice and fairness as well as to its hopes and fears. His speech warned working people that if the standard of living in the countryside did not parallel that in the city, urban workers could expect to see their conditions worsen through competition from rural migrants. Rural flight, Vargas said, threatened the government's goal of economically and physically strengthening the working class in order to enhance national productivity. For rural listeners, however, Vargas's address offered the promise of parity, proposals to make country life more desirable and equivalent to town life. One strategy was rural electrification; another was rural labor law.^{xi}

Social Rights Congress

The First Brazilian Social Rights Congress followed Vargas's speech by two-weeks. In it, labor ministry officials, lawyers, and planters debated the extension of industrial labor law to agricultural workers. To many planters, Brazil's true vocation was agriculture, and urban industry introduced alien values, especially class relations. In the developing corporatist system of industrial relations, workers and bosses were required to define their own separate interests and, in the process of defending them before state mediators, both parties had to compromise in identifying mutual interests. Landlords feared this system would stimulate class struggle in the countryside where, according to them, intimate relations between workers and bosses erased class barriers. They refused to see paternalism as an incipient system of class relations. Only syndicates that teamed planters and their workers in unitary interest-groups gained support

among landlords. But officials strenuously objected to this idea because it would have legitimized traditional rural social relations, strengthening agrarian elites who questioned Vargas's power and economic vision.^{xii}

High-level conference participants included São Paulo coffee planters and spokesmen for the powerful Brazilian Rural Society (SRB), João C. Fairbanks and Francisco Malta Cardozo. Pericles Madureira de Pinho, a lawyer and polemicist, represented sugar cane growers and millers from the northeast state of Bahia. While they argued against the application of urban labor laws in the countryside, they did not oppose the concept of incorporating rural society within the Estado Novo's corporatist structure. Meeting in São Paulo for a week, these men joined other social reformers in the debate of a wide array of issues related to the corporatist reorganization of the Brazilian political economy. Agreeing that "rational" social organization was fundamental to Brazil's economic progress, they made their contributions in a cooperative rather than confrontational tone. As the congress had been called by the Vargas regime, contributors concerned themselves with refining the corporatist system rather than criticizing it. "In an era so rich and abundant in social legislation applicable to urban commercial and industrial activities," asked Fairbanks, "why is it that so few laws, almost none apparently, have been made for the benefit of agricultural activity?"^{xiii}

Agricultural spokesmen argued that the problems of rural society were unique and that problem-solving models developed for urban industrial and commercial society could not be applied to rural areas without careful study and adaptation.^{xiv} Moreover, they took advantage of the ambiguity of Vargas's speech to emphasize general productivity problems rather than the specific problems and conditions of rural laborers. In his speech, Vargas had addressed not only

the problems of "rural workers (*operarios rurais*)" but also those of "landless peasants (*camponeses sem gleba própria*). For the former, he called for the extension of urban labor law; for the latter, he offered a program of assistance to help them find and develop land in Brazil's considerable western frontier regions. This was part of the Westward March colonization scheme. "It is indispensable to raise the purchasing power of all Brazilians," said Vargas in referring to peasant productivity, "which can only be done by increasing the level of income of rural work."^{xv} Cardozo and the other planters seized this idea, which Vargas had presented as a motive for stimulating peasant consumption levels, and applied it to plantation agriculture. Thus, the linkage between increasing peasant production and income became an argument for improving plantation productivity as well as profits. In other words, they interpreted Vargas as saying that the critical problem was that of raising *agricultural* income not necessarily the income of agricultural workers and peasants.

With no rural worker representatives on hand to advocate alternative interpretations, these tactics enabled the planters to deflect attention from problems within rural society to the outside world. Whereas bottlenecks in industrial activity could be blamed on conflicts between capital and labor, this was not the case for agriculture. According to Fairbancks, the question of social rights was one of resolving the unjust exploitation of the agricultural sector by industrial capitalists, merchants, and other "speculators (*maquinistas*). [What would Dean say about this:] As for inequality between planter and laborer within rural society, its existence was denied. Plantations were "formed through the great solidarity of economic interest and intimate contact between boss and worker." Fairbancks further claimed that far from being poorer than planters, rural workers often had more cash on hand than employers. For Cardozo, coffee workers were

not really wage laborers but the planter's "work companions (*companheiros de trabalho*)."

Moreover, rural labor was only a temporary stage on the road to landholding. "As for the 'rural worker' (*operariado rural*) in Brazil," wrote Fairbancks, "it has to be understood as a provisional situation, a preparatory and provisional status on the road to landowner (*proprietário*)."

Labor laws appeared artificial in this setting; useful legislation was that which made it easier for workers to buy old coffee lands, becoming small-holders available to work on nearby plantations, and for planters to buy frontier territories, where "the tireless national laborer (*baiano*)" could be employed in "the grand spectacle" of founding new plantations.^{xvi}

Planters at the meeting denied the role of market forces on relations between rural owners and workers, emphasizing instead the "convergent and complementary interests" of each.^{xvii} By tying the earnings of both planters and laborers to the successful exploitation of the land, they denied the question of surplus labor expropriation. The planter spokesmen essentially argued that Brazilian agriculture was a hybrid capitalism.

The entire question rests in the 'possibility of economic exploitation' that will assure the boss or employer reasonable profits, capable of allowing each in his turn, a portion equivalent to the well-being and security needs of the agrarian laborers and employees.^{xviii}

However, this concept did not lead them to argue for the exclusion of rural labor from the corporatist system. Rather, the profound cohesiveness of rural society provided the footing on which they rested an argument for agriculture's inclusion in the corporatist system of representative *sindicatos* established by the Estado Novo.

One concern of São Paulo planters was a perception of their relative lack of influence in

the central government. They did not want to see Vargas's ideas for the organization of rural society put into effect without their voice being heard. Better still, if new agrarian laws were to be decreed, they wanted to be the ones who wrote them. Fairbancks protested the exclusion of Paulista coffee representatives in the drafting of a rural syndicalization scheme that had been composed by planters from the northeast and the National Agricultural Society (Sociedade Nacional de Agricultura-SNA), a Rio de Janeiro-based rival to the SRB.^{xix} "There's only one solution," Fairbancks stated at the congress, "obligatory syndicalization." According to Article 140 of Brazil's authoritarian 1937 Constitution, all sectors of the economy were to organize themselves into product-specific *sindicatos*. [Aligns with arguments of Feraesp today.] Within the agricultural sector, there would be separate syndicates for coffee growers, sugar cane planters and so on, as well as parallel *sindicatos* of workers in each of these categories. "The *sindicatos* would have active lawyers," Fairbancks explained, "so active and energetic that...they will make a big push for the recognition of the *sindicatos* as organs of the state."^{xx}

In advocating syndical organization for agriculture, Fairbancks offered no reservations about the likelihood of the formation of rural worker *sindicatos*. He either believed his own rhetoric about the tranquility and consensus of rural society or reasoned that the superior economic strength and organization of owners would guarantee their domination of the agricultural corporation. Quite possibly, he envisioned agricultural *sindicatos* that joined both workers and bosses in one union, the so-called *sindicato misto*.

In fact, Madureira revealed that the SNA's draft rural syndicalization law followed this design. For balance, the proposed legislation required five members of each category of "employers, employees, and peasants (*trabalhadores a conta própria*)" to join together before a

syndicate could win government recognition. This singular mixed syndicate would then arbitrate contracts between workers and bosses and landlords and tenants. "It is that no division exists between rural classes," Madureira explained, coining the term "planter clan (*clã fazendeiro*)" to describe the familial nature of plantation labor relations. He reiterated Fairbanck's argument that agriculture was a victim of banks and speculators; to rebuild agricultural productivity, rural workers and bosses should be allowed to stand together to fight the capitalist pariah. Employers and landlords would lead the clan, a hierarchy the draft law codified by preventing illiterates, naturalized Brazilians, and the foreign born from serving as union officials of any kind. "These circumstances must be taken into consideration for any law that is going to unite in association, *sindicato*, and later in a 'corporation,' the economically debilitated employer and poor, almost starving employees."^{xxi} In a dramatic shift from their initial response to the syndicalist model advocated by the tenentes in 1931, these agricultural spokesmen now seemed to tie their future to mandatory combination with workers.

Divide, Conquer and Develop

But it was just this sort of combination—a planter oligarchy revitalized by corporatist alliance with workers—that Vargas seemed most anxious to avoid. Part of the justification for the 1937 coup had included the need to keep rural laborers out of the manipulative hands of demagogues. "The false representation of the great rural mass--living in a near primal state with little comprehension of its rights--had turned frequent and it had become impossible to counter this through electoral politics. This situation," a policy maker explained, "occasioned the advent of the Estado Novo." By speaking directly to workers at the Vasco da Gama stadium in 1941, Vargas wanted to bypass Communists, Fascists, and Brazilian landlords. Similar ideas were

behind the radio program his administration developed and his labor minister Marcondes Filho used throughout the early 1940s. Talking directly to workers, the minister encouraged them to demand their rights while helping Vargas build a new Brazil by refraining from disruptive behavior such as strikes.^{xxii} For Vargas, change would come not only through unionization but also through rural labor laws--social rights (*direitos sociais*)--that unions would give workers the power to secure.^{xxiii}

Vargas had both economic and political objectives behind his program for the reform of rural society. One aimed at stimulating the economy; the other, at undermining the power of the landed oligarchy. By introducing measures to partially liberate rural workers from the singular dominance of the planters he hoped to both stimulate the productive and consumptive capacity of this huge and diverse class and to weaken the hold of landowners on Brazilian agricultural policy. Perceiving this as a threat to their interests, São Paulo coffee planters played a unique role in Vargas's strategy. Their long experience with wage labor and regulation in São Paulo led them to accept the concept of rural labor law, while their pride and interests led them to fight for laws which posed the least threat to their status and livelihood.^{xxiv} Their resistance to Vargas's reform agenda began with the May 1941 social rights congress and continued with participation on two governmental commissions formed to draft rural social legislation. Francisco Malta Cardozo served the coffee planters on both commissions, one drawing up a rural social code and the other a syndicalization law.^{xxv}

In August, Cardozo joined the newly-formed Special Study Commission for Rural Syndicalization. Headed by Arthur Torres Filho, president of the venerable SNA and director of the Ministry of Agriculture's Rural Economy Service (Serviço Economia Rural-SER), the

committee was charged with drafting a law to “organize rural life.” *A Lavoura*, the SNA's official journal, subsequently published a detailed report of the commission's deliberations.^{xxvi} While Vargas's inspiration was duly noted, the report attributed some force of action for the commission's work to rural workers, for it remarked on the weight of their expectations for the fulfillment of the president's promise to bring their conditions in line with those of urban workers. This introduction, including an unsigned preface, consisted of a series of interviews with members of the commission reprinted from an October 1941 issue of *A Manhã*, a Rio daily newspaper. The *Manhã* preface began with a populist claim:

The rural syndicalization law promised by the President of the Republic, a work that will place country laborers in a fraternal situation with urban laborers, not only opens a horizon of great dimension and promise for the laboring classes of the country. It also excites the masses who already enjoy the unmistakable benefits of the new syndical structure, who have anxiously followed the work and study of the Commission and, it is clear, await the advent of a work which will mark, without a doubt, an historic hour for the Brazilian proletariat.

Evidently, the commission sought not only to satisfy the "appeals arriving from peasant laborers" but also to the expectations of incorporated urban workers. This, at any rate, was the public face of the commission's work. Those who read this introductory material were left with the impression that the commission had designed a plan to bring the "benefits of the new syndical structure" to the countryside. Those who read further in the document found quite different results.

The commission met for the first time in the afternoon of August 21 and continued to

meet on a weekly basis until September 25, 1941. The group began its deliberations with a working draft of the law already provided by the SER.^{xxvii} They then discussed it, identified points of agreement and voted on matters of contention. While consensus was the rule, the commissioners did not shy away from controversy and they agreed to disagree on some points in order to continue their work. One of the first disagreements concerned the wisdom of inviting a rural labor representative to participate in the discussion. The pros and cons were debated with Cardozo consistently opposed to the idea, asserting his capacity to speak for the interests of all rural classes in São Paulo. While the idea was supported by representatives from the labor ministry and other government agencies, Torres concluded the discussion by observing that Vargas himself had appointed the commission as an intra-governmental body with additional, private sector members representing three significant agricultural zones and products: Rio Grande do Sul beef, São Paulo coffee, and Pernambuco sugar. "The commission was not set up to have a laborist character," said Torres. If Vargas had wanted a rural worker on it, he would have appointed one.

Another significant area of disagreement, one already debated in public, concerned the nature of the unions, whether there should be parallel or mixed syndicates of workers and employers. Although the workers' apparent "cultural deficiency" and other arguments were used to deny them the right to organize independently, a majority of the commission voted in favor of separate unions for each class. The case for parallel unions was first argued by Régo Monteiro, the sole labor ministry representative on the panel. A system of mixed membership syndicates, he said, was inconsistent with the "corporatist spirit of the Constitution, where various articles recommend equality of representation between employers and employees."

In a surprising development, Cardozo spoke in support of Monteiro. In seeming discordance with the position he, Fairbancks and Pinho had struck at the social rights congress, Cardozo described mixed syndicates as a "confusion incompatible with Aristotelian criteria." He advocated a system wherein employers and employees would have separate unions at the municipal level and join together to resolve their differences in federations organized in each state. To advocate separate syndicates, the agricultural ministry representative said, was to ensure inequality between workers and bosses. Since each union's membership was responsible for financing and operating their own union, employee syndicates would be debilitated in many ways. But the cattleman supported Cardozo's opinion and the justice ministry delegate supported Monteiro's interpretation of the law. At day's end, the commission voted five to three in favor of separate unions for workers and bosses.^{xxviii}

Numerous additional issues divided the commissioners. While Monteiro sought to expand the role of the labor ministry in agriculture, most other members resisted his amendments to the draft law. During the commission's third meeting Monteiro insisted that sugar refining and coffee processing were industrial activities that should be governed by industrial labor law but Cardozo and the Pernambucan vociferously rejected this definition. Monteiro also tried to win support for placing the unions under the umbrella of his ministry, but the commission resoundingly rejected that proposal, preferring the oversight of the agricultural ministry. After a month's work, the members completed their report and congratulated themselves on their efforts. They recommended to President Vargas a corporatist union structure for the agrarian sector, with parallel employer and employee syndicates organized regionally and registered with the Ministry of Agriculture. All workers in the sector were to be considered rural workers, including those in

agro-industries.^{xxix} Three years passed before the commission's report resurfaced.

Rural Workers in the CLT

Early in 1943, the battle over rural labor heated up when another government commission released the first draft of what became Brazil's Consolidated Labor Code (CLT). Since agricultural employers like the São Paulo coffee planters had not been invited to participate on this commission, they predictably reacted against the proposal. They called the law an "invasion of the field of rural activities" and argued that the law should not apply to rural labor.^{xxx} But this was an argument they could not win.

By 1943, the political context in Brazil and the world was changing. As the tide turned against the Axis powers in World War II, authoritarian regimes worldwide fell under increasing pressure to democratize. Brazil had allied with the United States and was the only South American nation to send troops into battle in Europe. Ironically, Brazilian troops fought in Italy, where Mussolini once reigned using the corporatist system of governance that had inspired the Estado Novo. The contradictions of Brazil's fight against fascism slowly eroded the ideological foundations of the Vargas regime. In 1943, a group of intellectuals in the state of Minas Gerais became the first to publicly challenge the regime when they issued a manifesto calling for Brazil's redemocratization. At the end of the year, Vargas responded to critics by openly promising to "readjust our political structure and devise ample and suitable formulas for the consultation of the Brazilian people" once the war had ended.^{xxxi} While the 1943 CLT was a sublimely corporatist document, it also created a system for the "consultation of the Brazilian people" and part of the pressure for democratization included the pleas of agricultural groups to secure just such a place at the government's table.

The proposed general labor code included rural workers along with urban workers as beneficiaries of many of its provisions.^{xxxii} In February 1943, Cardozo protested the reach of the proposal in a forum sponsored by the Social Rights Institute (Instituto de Direito Social), the organization of influential jurists, scholars, politicians, and bureaucrats that had sponsored the 1941 social rights congress. This prolific and aggressive advocate argued that agricultural production differed fundamentally from commercial and industrial activity because it depended on the rhythms of nature rather than the rhythms of the clock.

How does one legislate the rain, the sun, the hard earth, the necessity to plant, the suitability to divide the fruits, the contingency of doing the work of a sick or even healthy *colono*, given Saturdays sacrificed for the justified closing of the market on Sundays, or holidays to honor the days of the Saints of each zone and some times of each plantation--in short, this infernally simple operation that in reality is the utilization of agricultural labor, in function of conditions that escape human control?

When so much agricultural production depended on nature, asked Cardozo, how could one define the duration of the rural workday, regulate safety standards, or allow workers regular weekly days of rest or vacations. He pled for patience in the preparation of a specific rural code and labor law and the forestalling of plans to extend the social rights of urban workers to their rural counterparts.^{xxxiii}

Much to the displeasure of planters, the final version of the CLT applied to rural and urban workers alike general rules regarding minimum wages (Art. 76-128), vacations (Art. 129-131), labor contracts (Art. 442-467), advanced notice (Art. 487-491), and limitations on payment in goods rather than in currency (Art. 506).^{xxxiv} These measures provided rural workers

with a set of strictly limited basic rights. In the years to come, they sued for the application of these rights in a special Labor Court. Created in May 1941 as a division of the justice ministry, the new labor judiciary system was charged with mediating disputes between labor and capital. In 1943, Vargas established four regional labor tribunals (Tribunal Regional de Trabalho) and eight district labor courts (Juntas de Trabalho) and the number of juntas grew over the years until the system became a grand stage for orchestrating class struggle in both urban and rural sectors.^{xxxv} To this degree, Vargas defied the planter class and broke the pledge implied by the theory of authoritarian (via prussia) development.^{xxxvi}

Conflict between Vargas and the planters was as natural as their differing interests. The most outspoken group of São Paulo planters, the SRB, did not endorse the modernization model pursued by Vargas. In his brief biography of Vargas, Robert M. Levine argues that the Paulistas begrudgingly accepted Vargas era reforms. The “employment of nationalistic and corporatist measures went against the grain of the paulista tradition that considered politics as a tool to further their business interests.”^{xxxvii} To pursue his vision of Brazil, Vargas tampered with the rural oligarchy. The country needed to defend urban industrial centers from an invasion of discontent rural workers and this pushed him to side-step the planters, who protested his attempts to enhance parity between urban and rural society. Vargas took steps to empower rural workers through the CLT and the labor court, a gesture that spoke to rural labor interests while avoiding full confrontation with planters. In the meantime, the planters fought parallel syndicates for workers and bosses as well as labor ministry influence over rural unions because this threatened to weaken their influence over rural workers and their lands. Vargas toyed with these two propositions for the opposite reasons: they had the potential of strengthening his hand against the

pesky but powerful Paulistas.

A Rural Code and Rural Syndicalization

The planters continued their campaign to altogether exclude rural workers from the CLT by concentrating their efforts on the formulation of a rural code, the so-called *Código Rural*, which they hoped would supersede the CLT in the agrarian sector. When the draft labor code was published in January 1943, Cardozo immediately began work on a revision.^{xxxviii} As in many disputes between planters and the Vargas administration, the labor problem dominated the rural code debate. On May 4, three days after Vargas announced the institution of the CLT, Cardozo presented the SRB's official substitute code.^{xxxix}

A didactic, rambling yet comprehensive document of three "books," ten "titles," and forty-nine "chapters," the most extensive addition to the draft law was an eighteen chapter book entitled "Do Trabalho Rural," roughly "On Rural Labor." The proposed code was preceded by a twenty-four point commentary and justification which recalled the essence of the planter's attack against government interference, the labor ministry, and the application of "urban labor laws" in the countryside. At an April 1944 SRB meeting, Cardozo read a letter from Dr. Luciano Pereira da Silva, chair of a commission working on the law, which suggested that many of his ideas had been included in a new proposal. "Many of the provisions approved were consistent with the substitute adopted by the SRB'," Da Silva wrote. The final version reached Vargas's desk in July. It seems to have died there, however, because little about the code appears in the record until 1951 when one observer claimed that its chapters on rural labor were folded into another ill-fated rural labor proposal.^{x1} If Vargas really was just the "Mother of the Rich," and he was in a pact with planters, one might have expected the ready adoption of the code.

Instead, the rural syndicalization statute drafted in 1941 resurfaced in this context.^{xli} Developed by the rural syndicalization commission headed by Torres, the measure went through various revisions before President Vargas signed it into law on the seventh anniversary of the Estado Novo, November 10, 1944. While this law, Decree 7,038, like much social legislation, remained little enforced, it became an important organizing tool for rural labor militants during the 1950s.^{xlii} Ironically, its transformation into something rural workers could benefit from owed much to Cardozo. As the coffee planter's chief lobbyist, Cardozo proved influential in shaping the measure. The final decree also shows that Cardozo's opinions had been changed by years of negotiation with bureaucrats and colleagues in other agricultural sectors.

As a member of the rural syndicalization commission, Cardozo had followed Rio Grande do Sul cattlemen in supporting the idea of separate municipal syndicates for workers and bosses. He worked to sway other members of the SRB to see this perspective as consistent with the interests of coffee planters and beef growers. For the June 7, 1944 meeting of the SRB, Cardozo invited Dr. Vasco de Andrade of the state labor department to speak. Andrade argued that parallel employee and employer unions could be beneficial for planters. "The *sindicatos* have normative functions," Andrade explained, "in which there are two equal *sindicatos*, one for the employer and one for employees, that come to an agreement and adopt certain norms for the execution of labor contracts; and they have a representative function, in which the *sindicatos* represent not only their members but all the individuals that practice their respective professions." For these two reasons, planters could expect worker *sindicatos* to be instrumental to their own interests. Andrade assured the planters that the syndical law would "create an associative spirit among the men of the country" rather than one of class hostility.^{xliii} For the final

version, Cardozo also supported the separation of labor and capital throughout the hierarchy of the corporatist system, in local, state, and national bodies.

On the key controversy of ministerial oversight, Cardozo unexpectedly approved of having the labor ministry control the entire structure of both employees and employers. The two categories were divided by a fairly simple definition: employers were those who worked for themselves, using the labor of others, and employees were those who worked for others, by themselves or as heads of households. "Organization constitutes the modern imperative of all society," Cardozo wrote. "Thus, responding to the appeals of the federal government and organizing itself in rural *sindicatos*, national agriculture will learn to present its class interests and great love of Brazilian land."^{xliv} Defying expectations, the SRB enthusiastically supported the new law. In a November editorial entitled "Rural Syndicalization," leaders reminded readers of "the importance of representation in rural syndicates" and emphasized the influence Cardozo and other agriculturalists had on the measure.^{xlv}

The support of the SRB and Cardozo was strictly self-interested, as a closer look at the details of the decree makes clear. Those rural workers who were allowed to organize employee unions faced a daunting task since members had to provide for the union's budget as well as accident insurance for members. Cardozo had lobbied to specifically *exclude* rural employers from contributing to a union tax (*imposto sindical*) used to finance employee unions in urban settings. Although commonly ignored by industrial employers, the tax was designed to overcome the extreme economic inequalities between working and owning classes.^{xlvi} Insisting that rural workers pay their own accident insurance actually represented a step backwards for workers since Decree 24,637 of 1934 had established a state and employer financed fund to cover the

costs of caring for both disabled urban and rural workers. Organized rural workers could not expect to find help abroad either, since affiliation with international groups was illegal under the syndicalization decree. Whereas one of the union's duties was "to collaborate with the public powers in the development of social solidarity," the *sindicatos* were "prohibited from exercising economic activity."^{xlvii}

Finally, Decree 7,038 included a clause that guarded a special place for organizations such as the SRB in the Brazilian state. Article 20, which had not appeared in any previous versions of the law, specified that the president retained the power to license certain civil associations with some of the same rights the syndicates were being established to handle. The article would allow organizations like the SRB to "collaborate with the Government, as technical consultants, on the solution of problems" affecting agriculture without being held accountable for any other duties outlined in the law. The Ministry of Agriculture, mentioned only in this article, had the power to nominate organizations for this function.^{xlviii} In the end, the rural syndicalization law posed little immediate threat to planters. Worker unions would be impoverished, *colonos* would remain in a nebulous position, and the SRB would continue as a powerful lobby. How it was going to turn out depended on the Vargas administration. "We are waiting to see how the law is regulated," an SRB editorial explained, "to see what comes of the representative organ of Agriculture," a reference to the planter group.

Four months later, in March 1945, the ministry of labor issued instructions necessary for the official recognition and administrative organization of the unions.^{xlix} Nonetheless, as late as 1955, only five rural worker unions *nation-wide* had been recognized by the labor ministry, and by 1962, only one more had been legalized. For that matter, no rural employer syndicates had

been formed.¹ Contemporaries blamed the ineffectiveness of the law on its failure to fit rural socio-economic realities. The law was "fatally tied up" by the near "impossibility of defining professional activity and the broad territorial dispersion of the agricultural class," editorialized the SNA's *A Lavoura*. It went unfulfilled, wrote José de Segades Vianna, "for maladjustment with its times." Even before it was decreed, the jurist and legal scholar A. F. Cesarino Jr. anticipated that rural labor syndicalization was virtually impossible because of nomadism and illiteracy among rural workers and their relative isolation from one another. These drawbacks were compounded by the absence of adequate means of communication, he said.^{li}

The Organization of Rural Life Decree

These obstacles were real but so was the unwillingness of the Vargas administration to mobilize rural workers. Subsequent events confirm, however, that the administration was equally unwilling to aid the SRB. In fact, as the pressure for democratization grew with the collapse of fascism and the end of hostilities in Europe, weakening the SRB, which so forcefully defended the interests of the rural oligarchy his government had overthrown, grew more important to Vargas.^{lii} In April, he issued a new decree to regiment rural society geographically rather than by agricultural activity, as had been provided for in the 1944 rural syndicalization decree.^{liii} The SRB saw this new law as an attack upon its prerogatives, holding up the 1944 decree as far more rational and preferable. In the SRB's calculation, the 1944 law gave coffee a substantial advantage because coffee growers were the most powerful and best organized agrarian interest group in Brazil. On the other hand, the new decree demanded that they sub-divide and pool their resources with other interests to form municipal associations. As Cardozo noted, this greatly diluted the power and influence of coffee planters.^{liv} After an onslaught of criticism from the

SRB, Vargas revised and re-issued Decree 8,127 with implementation regulations just five days before he was deposed in October 1945.^{lv}

For the *paulistas*, the new "organization of rural life" law was far worse than the rural syndicalization law had ever been: their complaints had obviously not been heard.^{lvi} Cardozo decried the law as "fascist and totalitarian" because it virtually delegitimized the SRB by allowing no provisions for the recognition of organizations not formed and registered according to the law. In contrast, under the syndical law, the SRB had retained the chance of official status in Article 20. According to the new decree, however, the only organizations to play an official role were those built upon the new structure with its geographical base. Adding insult to injury, Cardozo went on, the law favored the Rio de Janeiro-based SNA with two slots for representatives on the board of directors of the Brazilian Rural Confederation (CRB), the new, maximum organ of the regional rural employer associations and state federations. In article after article, Cardozo and other planters demanded "the pure, simple, and immediate revocation of Decree 8,127, that offends the democratic principles of Brazilian legislation."^{lvii}

Despite SRB protests, the number of rural *employer* associations registered under law 8,127 grew. In February 1946, the government recognized a São Paulo state federation of these entities (FARESP).^{lviii} Shortly thereafter, FARESP established a monthly bulletin to promote the organization of other associations and to give voice to São Paulo's increasingly diversified community of farmers.^{lix} For the SRB, these associations represented an unacceptable challenge to its authority. In defending their position, planter spokesmen spared no words: "The SRB," one member proclaimed, "has incontestable authority to represent agriculturalists, and to defend their rights and interests, before the governors of the Republic."^{lx} But the SRB's position was highly

contested.^{lxi} The ineffectiveness of their support for the syndical law and opposition to the association law revealed the internal struggle waging within the Brazilian ruling class. Barely any mention was made of the fact that the new law affirmed the SRB's prior demand for "mixed" associations. Since law 8,127 permitted only one association per area, agricultural employers and employees had to unite in defining their "class interests." Clearly, intra-class rivalry and not class struggle shaped the composition of these laws.

Vargas was determined to whittle away at the power of the coffee planters and cattle barons who headed the SRB, yet he was not nearly so committed to empowering rural workers to do this for him. As Levine comments, Vargas "did not work to synthesize opposites."^{lxii} He preferred to let the parties work out their differences. The extreme inequality of rural classes left farm workers at an extreme disadvantage in the association structure. The fact that so few rural labor unions were formed demonstrates how various governments, from Vargas to Jânio Quadros in 1961, remained ambivalent toward the incorporation of rural workers. The politicians sought to contain the SRB by favoring competitors, not by mobilizing rural workers. When the SRB managed to turn the syndical law, intended to weaken them, into a tool to help them retain their faltering authority, Vargas produced the association law rather than a program of rural labor mobilization. Both sides had dismissed this option and excluded rural workers from participation in discussions regarding their well-being.

Nevertheless, the debate over the organization of rural life initiated by Vargas underscored a new disposition in Brazil: a realization that rural society had to be incorporated formally somehow, someday. Composed of many parts—of studies, laws, actions, ideas, and models—this realization that incorporation was inevitable had the greatest impact on rural life in

the years to come. Like modern industrial society, agricultural society had to be organized, Vargas maintained, and no one after him could deny the implications of this point of view. The concrete steps Vargas took toward the fulfillment of this idea included the set of equivalent benefits for urban and rural workers in various articles of the CLT as well as the corporatist organizational initiatives that remained incomplete. Models for state sanctioned rural employer and employee syndicates were now part of the political and administrative landscape. These unions were to be regional rather than commodity based, a technicality of tremendous import for the mobilization of both employers and employees. Their registration through the labor and not the agricultural ministry asserted the commonality of workers and bosses in all sectors.

Although most of these ideas remained unfulfilled in 1945, resolving these Vargas era initiatives lingered as a significant challenge for the nation. When his regime collapsed and the new political parties developed to compete for power, candidates found themselves seeking rural support in unprecedented ways. The promise of state intervention in rural life meant the votes of rural workers counted as much as (and potentially more than) the allegiance of planters and landlords. For Communist party militants, Decree law 7,038 helped legitimize in the eyes of workers the formation of rural labor syndicates, despite their dubious status. Moreover, the special labor court system Vargas established became a means for rural workers and their new political agents to demand rights granted to them in the CLT. Thus, by 1945, Vargas had generated a series of laws, ideas, and approaches to the organization of rural life that proved an enduring part of his legacy.

Rural Life In Organization

By 1963, the motivations that had compelled Vargas to encourage the organization of rural life

also influenced his protege, Jango Goulart, to both promote and accept rural unionization. At the beginning of the year, Goulart created the Superintendency of Agrarian Policy (Superintendencia de Politica Agraria--SUPRA), the first rendition of what would later be called the National Agrarian Reform Institute (INCRA). In March, the Rural Laborer Statute (Estatuto do Trabalhador Rural--ETR) became law. Year's end brought official recognition to the National Confederation of Laborers in Agriculture (Confederação Nacional dos Trabalhadores na Agricultura - CONTAG) at a congress featuring delegates from twenty-seven state federations and more than 700 local unions (200 to 300 of them official), representing thousands of workers. Before the end of Goulart's formal term of office in December, 1965, his labor minister expected SUPRA to help set-up 2,000 more rural unions, establish 500 new labor courts, register three million new voters, and stimulate pressure to support the implementation of the ETR and a land reform statute then in draft form. Under the tutelage of President Goulart, who first advocated for rural labor legislation as Vargas's labor minister in 1953, these new institutions made concrete the proposals the Vargas administration had envisioned twenty years earlier.

Analysts of the ETR routinely tie the statute to a long history of proposals and counter-proposals, beginning with the 1903 rural unionization law (No. 979), passing through Vargas's 1944 decree No. 7,038 and ill-fated 1954 bill (No. 4,264), and extending up to the draft version of the final Estatuto do Trabalhador Rural, Project No. 1,837, proposed in May 1960 by Rio Grande do Sul delegate Fernando Ferrari. From his first years in congress under President Vargas until his last under Goulart, Ferrari developed a reputation for advocating rural labor legislation. A book of his speeches on the subject, *Escravos da Terra (Slaves of the Land)*, published posthumously (he died in a May 1963 airplane crash), showed him to be the recipient

of appeals from rural workers and rural labor leaders such as Benedito Pereira Serra, president of the Communist party affiliated Pará state rural labor organization. A skillful spokesman, Ferrari's arguments reflected nearly all of the motives for passing such a law that Vargas and Goulart had expressed. Like them, Ferrari saw the ETR as a means of stopping the rural exodus. It promoted development and strengthened industrialization by creating a new class of rural consumers. The ETR ensured social peace and disciplined rural production processes. It also promised to expand the electorate, bringing populists more votes and circumventing traditional clientelistic power networks. It provided a way to uplift the rural poor and dilute the attractions of communism. The new law empowered rural workers and erased the legacies of slavery in Brazil, Ferrari wrote.^{lxiii}

Despite Goulart and Ferrari's efforts, no single law could satisfy all of the contradictory expectations of such diverse objectives. Recall that in 1944, the SRB supported the rural unionization decree, so long as it left rural workers no way of funding their organizations. But the ETR included the *imposto sindical* (union tax), which permitted the deduction of one day's pay for all workers in the union's jurisdiction, whether or not they belonged to the entity (Art 135). The ETR also made it easy for the rural employer associations organized under the CRB, through Decree 8,127 of 1945, to convert into syndicates (Art 141)--which they soon did, creating the National Agriculture Confederation (Confederação Nacional de Agricultura--CNA) as their answer to CONTAG. The CNA endorsed the corporatist system and saw a controlled official union structure as better than the anarchic mobilization then presumed to be afflicting many plantations. For workers, the new law grouped together a variety of existing rights and duties, and expanded on them, making them fit agricultural realities more specifically than they had as provisions of the CLT. These matters included rights to paid vacations (Arts 43-48),

notice of dismissal (Arts 90-94), weekly days of rest (Art. 42), and individual contracts (Title IV). Planters had successfully kept earlier laws from requiring workers to have a "work booklet (*carteira profissional*)," but the ETR mandated their distribution free of charge to all workers fourteen years old and older (Arts 11-24). With the booklet in hand, all workers would be armed with copies of their labor contract, general laws applying to them, as well as a work history, something like the *Caderneta Agrícola* issued to *colonos* since the 1920s. The ETR also included new rights for rural workers such as the eight-hour-day (Arts 25-27) and prohibitions against dismissing pregnant and married women (Arts 54-56) and assigning minors to do physically demanding and unhealthy work (Arts 57-61). Significantly, article 179 extended those provisions of the CLT not covered in the ETR to rural laborers. Thus, in 1963, the long promised proposal of extending urban law to rural workers and of creating a special law to regulate rural labor relations became a reality.^{lxiv}

Planters in the SRB complained vehemently about the ETR just as they had objected to every Vargas initiative. SRB President Salvio de Almeida Prado saw the law as the product of "electoral demagoguery and lambasted it for thoughtlessly applying inappropriate urban standards to rural settings. "The diploma approved for farming is a loyal copy of the labor regime of the cities, presenting itself as one of the most grave and difficult problems to be resolved in the present context," Almeida Prado editorialized. Even though the specific bill that became the ETR had been under review since 1960, Almeida Prado complained that inadequate study had gone into the measure, and it had been passed too quickly. Anthropologist Verena Stolcke later argued that it was not the speed with which the ETR passed but the fact the SRB had so little influence in writing it that bothered Almeida Prado. This is entirely consistent with past

behavior, for few issues had outraged former SRB leader Francisco Malta Cardozo more than being excluded from the process. Despite improved economic indicators for coffee, SRB spokesmen maintained that their profit margins were too narrow to enable them to comply with the law. Because they were “subordinated and “dependent” on “economic happenings” outside their control, planters had to “lower their responsibilities” by converting their “dispensable fund of manual labor.” In other words, they had to fire workers to protect their profits.^{lxv}

Planters invested their profits in a plot to overthrow Goulart, a plot that came to fruition in a brief but effective *golpe de estado* at the end of March, 1964. São Paulo coffee planters felt less threatened by the ETR itself than they did by the SUPRA. State intervention always inspired their most strenuous criticisms of Vargas and their reaction to the corporatist initiative represented by the combined ETR and its enforcement by SUPRA pushed planter leaders to make their organization a central pillar of the *golpe*. For many, the last straw was the activation of SUPRA early in 1964. Given the extraordinary independence of executive branch agencies under the 1946 constitution, SUPRA threatened to tip the balance of power against Brazil’s most traditional privileged class. Under these circumstances, democracy itself had subverted the social order and disrupted the proper path of political and economic progress. The planters repudiated SUPRA and then they repudiated the system that gave birth to it. Standing against a system that extended back thirty years to the time of Vargas, these restorationists falsely characterized themselves as revolutionaries. Determined to establish a government that would protect their property and advantages, they helped the military seize power.^{lxvi}

Conclusion

The military-civilian conspiracy that took power in 1964 might have eliminated the ETR and

SUPRA, thus ridding Brazil of the Vargas legacy. But neither this authoritarian regime nor the civilian elected governments that came to power after 1985 fulfilled the planters' wish to be left to their own devices. Instead, each successive government found utility in the interventionist and regulatory apparatus Vargas had inspired. SUPRA was disbanded but new agricultural planning agencies like the INCRA arose in its place. In 1973, the ETR was reformed and replaced by Law 5,889 but regulation of rural labor relations through state-sanctioned class-based syndicates remained in effect. In 1988, Vargas's much disputed rural unionization initiative was embedded in Article 8 of Brazil's new magna carta. In fact, the syndicate, federation and confederation structure, with more than 3,000 rural worker unions organized under CONTAG's umbrella and hundreds of employer syndicates reported to the CNA, mandatory dues deduction, and labor court oversight, remains in place today. The specific nature of each of these laws, agencies, and organizations has changed significantly but the motives behind them and the basic Vargas-era objective of using the state to organize rural life has persisted into the present.^{lxvii}

The persistence of this corporatist legacy owes much to those who have benefited most from it: big agricultural producers, land speculators, and bureaucrats in government and unions. In a sociological study of the contemporary rural union structure, Claudinei Coletti demonstrates that a campaign to build a vigorous, class conscious movement among rural workers based on free trade unions soon succumbed to the temptations of the existing corporatist system. In the late 1980s, the radical Unified Laborers' Central (Central Unica dos Trabalhadores - CUT) gave up efforts to start new rural unions and dedicated themselves instead to taking over existing unions. Employers and the government had refused to negotiate with the upstart unions and the state-sanctioned syndicates enjoyed not only recognition and a network of support, but funding

from an obligatory dues-check off system. It made more sense to infiltrate this system than to confront it and by the end of the 1990s, CUT loyalists had won positions of authority in enough local unions and state federations to take control of CONTAG as well. Coletti interprets these developments negatively because history reaffirmed the Vargas-era system and he argues vigorously that this structure has not served the interests of workers well.

The history of rural labor mobilization in both the 1950s and from the 1980s to the present suggest alternative conclusions. While the structure needs reform, it has been the source of unprecedented support for the rural poor and the focus of unprecedented levels of farm worker activism. In the 1950s, workers and militants worked to establish unions and pressure the labor courts to apply the law fairly. In the 1960s, the structure mobilized thousands of workers to defend their economic and political interests for the first time. The sindical movement grew geometrically in the 1970s, especially after 1971 when the Fundo de Assistência Rural (Funrural) was established. Instituted, ironically, by the hardline administration of General Garrastazu Médici, the Funrural represented the realization of the parity in conditions for rural and urban workers that Vargas had dreamed about so many decades before. Funrural allowed the rural labor unions to provide health care, legal services and social security insurance for the rural poor where no such services had existed, helping to ameliorate some of the worst traumas of the devastating process of agricultural development. During this period, despite military rule, many of these unions fought for agrarian reform, working with the new landless to maintain or regain their access to land. From the late 1970s, workers and militants used the unions and the laws to gather tens of thousands of workers in strikes for higher wages and better conditions. Indeed, as CUT activists concluded, the structure could help workers. In other words, it was not the

structure but the people who ran the unions and the policies of the government in power that determined how effective the system was in advocating for rural workers and bosses. In his close study of how rural labor unions behaved under military rule, the anthropologist Biorn Maybury-Lewis called this “the politics of the possible.”^{lxviii}

There are few assessments of Vargas’s efforts to organize rural life.^{lxix} Analysts from the right to the left of the ideological spectrum tend to emphasize cynical intentions and outcomes. For the right, the corporatist labor structure laid an artificial grid over natural processes, interfering in both the course of agricultural cycles and market forces. For the left, rural syndicalization was a fascist social control mechanism that hobbled class struggle and defanged unions by turning them into political clubs and social service agencies. Only a few analysts have conceded that the structures envisioned by Vargas, established by Goulart, reformed by the military, and utilized by militants and workers, offered the rural working class more than it had prior to Vargas. This paper merely tries to demonstrate that Vargas’s vision for the organization of rural life cannot be reduced to a mere mechanism of ruling class control; it suggests that more research may show that the structure has the potential of providing Brazilian rural workers more opportunities and benefits than rural workers enjoy almost anywhere else in the world.

ENDNOTES

i. A helpful introduction to Vargas is Robert M. Levine, *Father of the Poor? Vargas and His Era* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998). Evidence of his continuing influence can be found in various publications marking the fiftieth anniversary of his suicide. See, for example, articles by Aldalberto Paranhos, Paulo Roberto de Almeida and Rudá Ricci in "Especial -- Getúlio Vargas: 50 anos," *Revista Espaço Acadêmico* 39 (agosto de 2004) at <http://www.espacoacademico.com.br/>. Accessed 14 August 2004.

ii. A few analysts have recently taken up the question of rural labor in the Vargas era. An excellent analytical history is provided by Maria Yedda Linhares and Francisco Carlos Teixeira da Silva, *Terra prometida: uma história da questão agrária no Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro: Editor Campus, 1999), 103-35. Leonilde Servolo de Medeiros emphasizes rural labor relations reform in her "Os trabalhadores do campo e desencontros nas lutas por direitos," in André Leonardo Chevitarese, org., *O campesinato na história* (Rio de Janeiro: Relume Dumará, Faperj, 2002) and Neuri Domingos Rossetto emphasizes land reform in his "Lutas e práticas de resistência dos camponeses na era Vargas (1930-1945)" (Diss. de mestrado, PUC-SP, 2003). None of these studies, however, wrestles with the details of the 1930 to 1945 period.

iii. Linhares e Da Silva, *Terra prometida*, 103-04.

iv. A revealing critique of the contemporary impact of Vargas's policies on rural workers is Claudine Coletti, *A estrutura sindical no campo* (Campinas: Ed. da UNICAMP, 1998). Coletti followed fashion in accepting the argument that rural sindicalization "só foi levado ao meio rural no início dos anos 60, mais precisamente a partir de 1962," when considerable evidence demonstrates the weakness of this position, especially when applied to the region Coletti studies, that of Ribeirão Preto, São Paulo, where Vargas-era structures gave life to official rural labor organizations as early the 1940s. See, for example, Clifford Andrew Welch, "Rural Labor and the Brazilian Revolution in São Paulo, 1930-1964" (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1990).

v. Edgar de Decca *1930: O silêncio dos vencidos: Memória, história, e revolução* (São Paulo: Ed. Brasiliense, 1994), 183-205, stresses the indirect influence of the BOC on the nature and character of the October revolution and the early Vargas administration. "A Plataforma da Aliança Liberal," in Getúlio Vargas, *A Nova Política do Brasil* vol 1 (Rio de Janeiro: José Olympio, 1938), 26-28,

vi. Joan L. Bak, "Cartels, Cooperatives, and Corporations: Getúlio Vargas in Rio Grande do Sul on the Eve of Brazil's 1930 Revolution," *HAHR* 63:2 (May 1983), 273-74. For more interpretations of the revolution see also, Boris Fausto, *A revolução de 1930. Historiografia e história* (São Paulo: Ed. Brasiliense, 1970). Angela Maria de Castro Gomes, "Confronto e compromisso no processo de constitucionalização (1930-1935)," in Fausto, ed., *História geral da civilização brasileira*, 7-75, discusses the early politics of the new regime.

vii. Quotes from Vargas, "A plataforma," 50-52, 29 and 28.

viii. Vargas, "A plataforma," 28. The final quote reads: "despertar-lhes, em suma, o interesse, inculcando-lhes hábitos de atividade e de economia."

ix. Collor's tenure as labor minister was influential, controversial, and brief. See Angela de Castro Gomes, *A invenção do trabalhismo* (Rio de Janeiro: IUPERJ, 1988), 175-210 and Rosa Maria Araújo, *O batismo do trabalho: experiência de Lindolfo Collor* (Rio de Janeiro: Ed. Civilização Brasileira, 1981). For the rural plan see, Lindolfo Collor, "Relatorio ao Chefe do Governo Provisorio," 6 March 1931, appendixes. Ministerio de Trabalho, Industria, e Comercio (Lata 46), Fundo da Secretaria da Presidencia da Republica, Arquivo Nacional, Rio de Janeiro (hereafter, SPR/AN).

x. Michael L. Conniff, "The Tenentes in Power: A New Perspective on the Brazilian Revolution of 1930," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 10:1 (1977): 61-82. Clube 3 de outubro, *Esboço do programa de reconstrução política e social do Brasil* (1932) cited in Aspasia de Alcântara Camargo, "A questão agrária: crise do poder e reforma de base (1930-1964)" in *História geral da civilização brasileira* Tomo 3: *O Brasil republicano* vol. 3: *Sociedade e política (1930-1964)*, ed. Boris Fausto, 3rd ed. (São Paulo: DIFEL, 1986), p. 135-136. Boris Fausto, *A revolução de 1930. Historiografia e história* (São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1970), pp. 56-84, challenges the sincerity of the tenentes.

xi. Speech from Getúlio Vargas, *A nova política do Brasil* vol.3 (Rio de Janeiro: José Olympio, 1940), 255-63. In outlining the benefits won for urban labor, Vargas specified the creation of the labor department (Ministerio do Trabalho), job preference to Brazilian nationals (*lei dos dois terços*); unions; social security; regulated industrial hours; standardized wage scales for women and children ("*a regulamentação do salariado de mulheres e menores*"); paid vacations; medical assistance; cafeterias (*restaurantes populares*); and the minimum wage (p. 260). Block quote from Vargas, *A nova política do Brasil* vol. 3, p 261. In an early part of the speech, Vargas announced the institution of the Justica do Trabalho. This department of the judiciary eventually became an important instrument for the fulfillment of the objective of extending Brazilian labor law in the countryside (p. 261).

xii. Contributions to the debate can be found in Instituto de Direito Social, *Anais do Primeiro Congresso Brasileiro de Direito Social*, 4 vols. (Rio de Janeiro: Serviço de Estatístico da Previdência e Trabalho, 1943-1945). The conference is discussed in Clifford A. Welch, "Rural Labor and the Brazilian Revolution in São Paulo, 1930-1964" (unpub. Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1990): 22-38.

xiii. João C. Fairbanks, "Tese oferecida ao primeiro congresso de direito social," in *Anais*, 191.

xiv. Francisco Malta Cardozo, "Aplicação das leis sociais as classes agrarias," *Anais* vol. 3, pp. 220-222.

xv. Vargas, *A nova política do Brasil*, vol. 3, pp. 261-2. For a discussion of the marcha see, Lenharo, *Sacralização da política*, 53-74 and Alcir Lenharo, "A terra para quem nela não

trabalha" *Revista Brasileira de História* 6:12 (March/August 1986): 47- 64.

xvi. Fairbancks, "Tese oferecida," 193-96 & 200 and Cardozo, "Aplicação das leis sociais," 214.

xvii. Fairbancks, 193.

xviii. Malta Cardozo, "Aplicação das leis sociais," p. 218.

xix. Madureira had revealed at the congress that he and Arthur Torres Filho, president of the Sociedade Nacional de Agricultura (SNA, fd. 1897), had submitted a proposal regarding the formation of rural unions to the Ministry of Agriculture early in 1941. While they had yet to receive a response, the fact that the government had asked the SNA rather than the SRB (fd 1919) to compose a law on this sensitive issue clearly concerned the paulistas. For São Paulo coffee planters, agriculture's inclusion was not only proceeding slowly but it was being influenced by a group they could not accept as representative. Pericles Madureira de Pinho, "Fundamento da organização corporativa das profissões rurais" *Anais* vol. 4, pp. 76-77.

xx. Fairbancks, "Tese oferecida," p. 202.

xxi. A copy of the draft legislation is printed as "Ante-Projeto de Decreto-Lei Para Sindicalização Rural," in "O Problema," 11-30. Madureira quoted from "Fundamentos da organização," pp. 77 and 79.

xxii. Lenharo, *A Sacralização da política*, 38-51 and Gomes, *A invenção do trabalhismo*, 257-87.

xxiii. Estado Novo quote from Ben Hur Raposo, "O Problema," 39. On the philosophy of Brazilian labor justice system see Waldemar Martins Ferreira, *Princípios de legislação social e direito judiciário do trabalho* vol. 1 (São Paulo: Editorial Ltd, 1938), pp. 27-57 and 99-103, and Evaristo de Moraes Filho, *O problema do sindicato unico no Brasil* (São Paulo: Alfa-Omega, 1952).

xxiv. On the social question and Brazilian modernization see, Angela Maria de Castro Gomes, *Burguesia e trabalho. Política e legislação social* (Rio de Janeiro: Ed. Campus, 1979). On coffee planters and modernization see, Warren Dean, "The Planter as Entrepreneur: The Case of São Paulo" *Hispanic American Historical Review* 46:2 (May 1966): 138-52.

xxv. Cardozo's membership on the syndicalization commission is reported in "Organização sindical para a lavoura brasileira," *Revista da Sociedade Rural Brasileira* (Hereafter, *RSRB*) 24:286 (June 1944), 18-22. For the federal rural code commission see Cardozo's report to the 767th weekly meeting of the SRB, "Ante-projeto do Código Rural," *RSRB* 23:270 (February 1943), 7.

xxvi. "O problema da sindicalização rural," *A Lavoura* (Apr-June 1943), 4-78. Other than Cardozo and Torres Filho, the Comissão Especial de Estudos da Sindicalização Rural included

Luis Augusto do Rego Monteiro of the labor ministry; Campos Guimarães of the justice ministry; Ben-Hur Raposo of the Serviço de Economia Rural; Mendes Baptista da Silva, representing the sugar industry of Pernambuco; Antônio Camara of the agriculture ministry; Sylvio da Cunha Enchenique, representing Rio Grande do Sul cattlemen; and Luiz Marques Poliano of the health and education ministry.

xxvii. This is the same draft indirectly discussed at the Social Rights Congress in May, where the SRB had protested being excluded from its preparation.

xxviii. "O Problema," 33-42.

xxix. "O Problema," 42-78.

xxx. Cardozo, "Trabalho agrícola," 12-14.

xxxi. Levine, *Father of the Poor?*, 69-74. Vargas quoted in Thomas E. Skidmore, *Politics in Brazil (1930-1964): An Experiment in Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), 48-49.

xxxii. Cardozo objected to the following articles: No. 5(d), defining ranch and plantation workers; No. 10, issuing a regularized union-type work register (*carteira profissional*) to rural workers, signifying regulation of rural labor relations by the Labor Ministry; No. 52, regulating the hours of the work day; No. 242, regulating time-off and vacations; No. 342, providing special protections for minors; No. 491, stating that productive relations were to be defined by individual labor contracts, which would specify employer and employee obligations regarding services performed, methods of payment, advanced notice, and fines and indemnification for non-compliance with contractual terms; and No. 492, stating that no more than 30 percent of rural worker wages could be paid in goods, such as coffee or food. Cardozo, "Trabalho agrícola," 12-14.

xxxiii. Cardozo's address, "Trabalho agrícola," was reprinted in the March 1943 issue of the *RSRB*. Quotes are from pages 12 and 14.

xxxiv. See *Consolidação das Leis do Trabalho* (Rio de Janeiro: Imprensa Nacional, 1943), p. 12. The various articles are given on pages 12, 22-29, 76-78, 82 and 84, respectively.

xxxv. Castro Gomes, *A invencao do trabalhismo*, 255 and Welch, *The Seed was Planted*, chap 6.

xxxvi. The "agro-industrial block" concept is used by Azevêdo, *As Ligas Camponesas*. Azevêdo claims to have developed this idea of union between an older agrarian elite and a new bourgeoisie from the Italian case as it was analyzed by Antonio Gramsci. See Gramsci's "Notes on Italian History: The City-Countryside Relationship During the Risorgimento and the National Structure," *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (New York: International Publishers, 1971), pp. 90-102.

xxxvii. Levine, *Father of the Poor?*, 117.

xxxviii. Cardozo's membership on the federal rural code commission was reported to the 767th weekly meeting of the SRB. "Ante-projeto do Código Rural," *RSRB* 23:270 (February 1943): 7. The SRB's general response to the commission's first draft is given in an open letter from SRB Presidente Luiz Vicente Figueira de Mello to the agriculture minister, Apolonio Salles, as "Ante-projeto do Codigo Rural," pp. 36- 43. The letter was dated 6 February 1943.

xxxix. Vargas, *A nova politica do Brasil* vol. 3, and Gomes, *A invenção do trabalhismo*. Francisco Malta Cardozo, "Ante-projeto do Codigo Rural," *RSRB* 23:274 (June 1943), 12-41.

xl. For the labor code see, Cardozo, "Ante-projeto," 24-35. The preamble is on pages 12-16. The legislative history of the rural code needs to be studied in order to discover exactly why it never became law. For the April meeting, see "Legislação sobre trabalho rural e Código Rural," *RSRB* 24:287 (July 1944), 4. Its progress to Vargas is reported in "Lei da sindicalização rural," *RSRB* 35:295 (March 1945), 19. And for 1951, see José de Segades Vianna, *O Estatuto do Trabalhador Rural e sua aplicação. Comentários a lei no. 4.214, de 2 de março de 1963* 2nd ed. (Rio de Janeiro: Freitas Bastos, 1965), pp. 45-46. Segades Vianna, who then worked in the labor ministry, claimed that some aspects of the 1951 legislation (Bill 606, introduced by Silvio Echenique) eventually found their way into the ETR. (See J. M Catharino, *O Trabalhador Rural Brasileiro*, 38-39.) As chapter eight shows, however, the ETR differed significantly from Cardozo's treatise "On Rural Labor."

xli. "Dispõe sobre a Sindicalização Rural, Decreto-Lei No. 7038--de 10 de Novembro de 1944," *Revista de Direito do Trabalho* 7:6 (January-June 1945), 65-68.

xlii. See Cliff Welch, *The Seed Was Planted: The São Paulo Roots of Brazil's Rural Labor Movement, 1924-1964* (Penn State Press, 1999), esp., chapters 5 and 6.

xliii. For Andrade's comments see, "Sobre a sindicalização rural," *RSRB* 24:288 (August 1944), 134 and 136.

xliv. "Lei de Sindicalização Rural," introduced by Francisco Malta Cardozo, *RSRB* 24:290 (October 1944), 18-21.

xlv. "Organiza-se a Agricultura em Sindicato," *RSRB* 24:285 (May 1944): 15.

xlvi. "Sobre a sindicalização rural," *RSRB* 24:288 (August 1944), 16 & 130.

xlvii. "Dispõe sobre a sindicalização," 67-68.

xlviii. "Dispõe sobre a sindicalização," 68.

xlix. "Portaria Ministerial No. 14 de 19.3.1945" cited in José Gomes da Silva, *Noções sobre associativismo rural (organização da classe rural brasileira)* (Secretária da Agricultura, Centro

de Treinamento de Campinas, 1962), p. 2. Some contemporary authors claim that enabling regulations were not issued for Decree 7038. "The instructions were not elaborated and, consequently, the Law of Rural Syndicalization, was never enforced." Dr. Admastro Lima, "Sindicalização Rural," *A Lavoura* (July-August 1954), 29.

i. Francisco Antonio Azevêdo, *As ligas camponesas* (Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1982), p. 55 and Silva, *Noções sobre associativismo rural*, p. 4.

ii. See, "A Organização da Classe Rural," unsigned editorial, *A Lavoura* (October/December 1945), 2; Vianna, *Estatuto do trabalhador rural* and A. F. Cesarino Jr., "Sindicalização rural" *Revista do Direito Social* 4:24 (September 1944), 1.

iii. On labor in this transitional period see John D. French, "Industrial Workers and the Birth of the Populist Republic in Brazil, 1945-1946" *Latin American Perspectives* 16:4 (Fall 1989), 6-28.

iiii. "Decreto Lei 7.449 de 9 de abril de 1945, Dispõe sobre a organização da vida rural" in Mario Pentead de Faria e Silva, org., *Legislação agro-pecuária (relativa ao período de 1937-1947)* (São Paulo: Secretária da Agricultura: 1952), pp. 735-40.

lv. Francisco Malta Cardozo, "Organização compulsoria e democracia," *RSRB* 28:306 (February 1946): 20.

lv. "Decreto-Lei No. 8.127 de 24 de outubro de 1945, Altera e da nova redação ao Decreto-lei No. 7.449 de 9 de abril de 1945, que dispõe sobre a organização da vida rural" and "Decreto-Lei No 19.882 de 24 de outubro de 1945, Aprova o regulamento a que se referem os artigos 13 do Decreto-lei no. 7.449 e No. 24 do Decreto-lei No. 8.127" all in Faria e Silva, org., *Legislação agro-pecuária*, 740-55.

lvi. Fernando Gomes, "A organização da vida rural do país," *RSRB* 26:305 (January 1946): 18-19.

lvii. See Cardozo "Organização rural compulsoria," p. 20. See also, "Hierarquia e democracia," *RSRB* 26:307 (March 1946): 3- 4 and "Pela revogação da lei totalitarian" *RSRB* 37:326 (October 1947): 2.

lviii. FARESP, the Federação dos Associações Rurais do Estado de São Paulo, was recognized February 8, 1946. Silva, *Noções sobre associativismo rural*, 2.

lix. By 1962, there were 181 associations organized in the state of São Paulo, with 45,219 members. This was a small number given the huge economically active rural population in the state. Silva (*Noções sobre associativismo rural*, p. 3) says the associations accounted for only about five percent of farm owners.

lx. Gomes, "A organização da vida rural," p. 18.

Ixi. "Campanha de sócios" *RSRB* 27:322 (June 1947): 17. In this editorial, the editor reports that São Paulo had 268,238 rural properties and if the SRB had ten percent of these as members, it would be "one of the largest and most powerful class associations in the entire country."

Ixii. Levine, *Father of the Poor?*, 117.

Ixiii. On Lacerda's bill see, José Martins Catharino, *O Trabalhador Rural Brasileiro (Proteção Jurídica)* (Rio de Janeiro: Livraria Freita Bastos, s/a, 1958), 40-41. For the legislative history see *ibid.* (which includes a detailed analysis of Ferrari's 1956 proposal, No. 1938) and José de Segades Vianna, *O Estatuto do Trabalhador Rural e sua aplicação* (Rio de Janeiro: Freitas Bastos, 1965), 35-47. For more on Ferrari see, *Escravos da terra* (Rio de Janeiro: Globo, 1963)--the ULTAB letter is on pp. 107-108--and Renato Lemos and Elias Fajardo, "Ferrari, Fernando," in *DHBB*, 1256-57. Another glimpse into the legislative process is provided by Marta Cehelsky's study of the Land Statute (*Estatuto da Terra*) which was up for discussion in the same period as the ETR but not adopted until mid-1964. See her *Land Reform in Brazil*, esp. chap 3.

Ixiv. The copy of the law used here is in Ferrari, *Escravos*, 167-216. Among the most thorough and early legal examinations are Segadas Vianna, *O Estatuto* and Mozart Victor Russomano, *Comentários ao Estatuto do Trabalhador Rural* 2 vols. 2nd ed. (São Paulo: Ed. Revista dos Tribunais, 1969). Russomano takes the discussion back to Brazil's first constitution and an 1837 law (No. 108) which regulated contract labor, and includes copies of the ministerial *portarias* and decrees issued to regulate or modify the ETR from 1963 to 1967.

Ixv. Salvio de Almeida Prado, "Legislacao Trabalhistas," *A Rural* (August 1963), 3 and Verena Stolcke, *Coffee Planters, Workers, and Wives*, 108-10.

Ixvi. "A lavoura paulista repudia o decreto da SUPRA e reafirma seu pensamento em favor de uma reforma agrária justa e real," *A Rural* 44:515 (April 1964), 6. "Victorious in two days," wrote the SRB's Almeida Prado, "the military battle that constituted the first phase of the revolution...has a complete program of demands to fulfill." From the signed editorial, "Da Marcha da Família a revolução vencedora," *A Rural* 44:517 (May 1964), 3. Other clear examples of how the conspirators saw themselves as revolutionaries are represented in the titles of their memoirs. See, for example Mourão Filho's *Memórias: a verdade de um revolucionario* and Hernani D'Aguiar, *A revolução pro dentro* (Rio de Janeiro, 1976). For more on the SRB's expectations, see "Pronunciamentos da SRB durante a revolução redentora do país," *A Rural* 44:517 (May 1964), 28-30.

Ixvii. See Welch, *Seed*, epilogue and Coletti, *A Estrutura*, chapter 4.

Ixviii. José Murilo de Carvalho notes a connection between the expansion of social rights legislation and authoritarian rule in Brazilian history, linking the Estado Novo's CLT with initiatives like the Funrural from the military regime era. See chapter 3 in his *Cidadania no Brasil: o longo cominho* 5a ed. (Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 2004). Biorn Maybury-Lewis, *The Politics of the Possible: The Brazilian Rural Workers' Trade Union Movement*,

1964-1985 (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994).

lxix. In *Sindicatos, trabalhadores e a coqueluche neoliberal: A era Vargas acabou?* (Rio de Janeiro: Ed. Fundação Getúlio Vargas, 1999), Adalberto Moreira Cardoso argues that the corporatist structure in both rural and urban realms has so changed that it can no longer be identified with the system Vargas set up. An excellent historiographical analysis of Vargas's industrial labor policies is John D. French, *Afogado em leis: A CLT e a cultura política dos trabalhadores brasileiros* (São Paulo: Ed. Fundação Perseu Abramo, 2001).