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Social Struggles in Republican Brazil (1889-1989): Historiographical Debates and Interpretative Currents

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Abstract

This report presents a dense and reflective analysis of the trajectory of social struggles in Republican Brazil, encompassing the period from 1889 to 1989. The central objective is not to offer an exhaus-tive factual narrative, but rather to delve into the principal historiographical debates and the clashes between interpretative currents that have shaped academic understanding of the subject. The study examines five fundamental historical periods: the First Republic (1889-1930), characterised by the emergence of anarcho-syndicalism and the General Strike of 1917; the Vargas Era (1930-1945), epi-centre of the populism versus labour pact debate; the Democratic Period (1945-1964), marked by worker strikes and the Peasant Leagues; the Military Regime (1964-1985), analysing repression and the resurgence of social movements through the "new unionism"; and Redemocratisation (1985-1989), with the consolidation of movements such as the Workers' Party (PT), the Unified Workers' Central (CUT), and the Landless Workers' Movement (MST). The theoretical framework integrates contributions from E. P. Thompson, Eric Hobsbawm, Antonio Gramsci, James Scott, Charles Tilly, and Sidney Tarrow, alongside Brazilian historiographical debates. The report demonstrates the con-tinuous tension between interpretations that privilege structures of state control and co-optation, and those that emphasise the agency, resistance, and bargaining capacity of subaltern classes.

Keywords: social struggles; Brazilian historiography; labour movement; populism; new unionism; agrarian reform; redemocratisation

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Introduction

This report presents a dense and reflective analysis of the trajectory of social struggles in Republican Brazil, encompassing the period from 1889 to 1989. The central objective is not to offer an exhaustive factual narrative, but rather to delve into the principal historiographical debates and the clashes between interpretative currents that have shaped academic understanding of the subject. For a Livre-Docência examination, demonstrating mastery of historiography is as crucial as knowledge of events themselves. Therefore, the focus falls upon the critical analysis of the different theoretical lenses utilised to examine popular agency, class formation, relations with the State, and forms of protest throughout a century of profound social, political, and economic transformations in Brazil.

The Centrality of Social Struggles for Understanding Republican Brazil

Social struggles constitute a fundamental axis for understanding Brazilian republican history. Far from being mere epiphenomena or spontaneous reactions to economic transformations, they represent the motor of historical transformation, as argued by historians such as Eric Hobsbawm and E. P. Thompson [5, 9]. The analysis of popular mobilisations allows us to unveil the structural tensions of Brazilian society: land concentration, the super-exploitation of labour, structural racism, political exclusion, and state violence. More than this, the study of social struggles reveals the historical agency of subaltern classes, their capacity for organisation, resistance, and the formulation of alternative societal projects, challenging elitist narratives that relegate them to passivity or manipulation.

The historiography of social struggles in Brazil has undergone profound transformations in recent decades. If until the 1970s approaches prevailed that emphasised the fragility, immaturity, or dependence of popular movements on external leadership (intellectuals, parties, the State), the theoretical and methodological renewal promoted by social history permitted a radical reassessment. Influenced by Thompson, Hobsbawm, Antonio Gramsci, and more recently by James Scott and theorists of collective action such as Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow, Brazilian historians began to investigate forms of everyday resistance, repertoires of contention, popular political cultures, and the opportunity structures that condition the emergence and success of movements [1, 2, 4, 5, 9].

Periodisation of Social Struggles in the Republican Period

The periodisation of social struggles in Republican Brazil cannot be merely chronological; it must consider transformations in forms of organisation, repertoires of action, relations with the State, and the ideologies that orient movements. We can identify five major moments:

1. **First Republic (1889-1930)**: Marked by the emergence of the urban labour movement, strongly influenced by anarchism and anarcho-syndicalism, and by the outbreak of rural messianic movements (Canudos, Contestado) and cangaço. The oligarchic State treated the "social question" as a "matter for the police," and repression was brutal. Worker strikes, especially the General Strike of 1917, represent the apex of combativeness in this period [11, 13, 14, 19].
2. **Vargas Era (1930-1945)**: A period of profound transformation in relations between the State and the working class. The creation of the Ministry of Labour, labour legislation (CLT), and the corporatist union structure redefined the field of social struggles. The historiographical debate on "populism" versus "labour pact" reflects the complexity of this moment, marked simultaneously by co-optation and conquests [21, 25, 26, 27].

3. **Democratic Period (1945-1964)**: Redemocratisation, intensification of worker struggles (strikes of 1953 and 1963), emergence of Peasant Leagues and rural movements that placed agrarian reform on the national agenda. The period was marked by the ideological polarisation of the Cold War and ended with the military coup of 1964.

4. **Military Regime (1964-1985)**: Brutal repression of social movements, intervention in unions, political purges, and imprisonments. However, at the end of the 1970s, the "new unionism" emerged in São Paulo's ABC region, and urban social movements (against the high cost of living, for housing, health) and rural movements (CPT, agrarian conflicts) proliferated, which would be fundamental for redemocratisation [34, 38].

5. **Redemocratisation (1985-1989)**: A period of social effervescence, with the consolidation of "new unionism" (CUT), the founding of the PT and MST, and the mobilisation of Black, feminist, LGBT, and environmentalist movements. Popular participation in the 1987-1988 Constituent Assembly resulted in the inscription of social rights in the 1988 Constitution [41, 44, 45, 48, 50].

The analytical trajectory of this report will unfold following this periodisation, but always privileging historiographical debates and interpretative currents. First, we shall address the theoretical foundations that inform Brazilian historiography on the subject, highlighting the influence of international thinkers such as E. P. Thompson, Eric Hobsbawm, Antonio Gramsci, James Scott, Charles Tilly, and Sidney Tarrow. Subsequently, we shall examine worker struggles in the First Republic, with emphasis on anarcho-syndicalism and the General Strike of 1917, questioning narratives about the origin and autonomy of the movement. The third axis will concentrate on the Vargas period, epicentre of one of the richest debates in national historiography: the tension between the thesis of populism as manipulation, classically formulated by Francisco Weffort, and the revisionist perspective of the "labour pact," defended by Ângela de Castro Gomes. We shall also analyse the democratic period (1945-1964), with the Peasant Leagues and worker strikes. Subsequently, we shall examine the resurgence of social movements at the end of the Military Dictatorship and in the redemocratisation process, with the "new unionism" of São Paulo's ABC region and the emergence of actors such as the Landless Workers' Movement (MST) and the Unified Workers' Central (CUT), interpreted in light of the theories of Ricardo Antunes and Eder Sader.

In traversing these periods, the report will seek to evidence the continuous tension between interpretations that privilege structures of state control and co-optation and those that highlight the agency, resistance, and bargaining capacity of subaltern classes. This dialectic between structure and agency constitutes the guiding thread for a deepened and critical understanding of the history of social struggles in Brazil.

I. Theoretical Foundations and the Historiography of Social Struggles

Brazilian historiography on social struggles did not develop in an intellectual vacuum. On the contrary, it was profoundly fecundated by international theoretical debates, which provided conceptual tools to overcome merely descriptive or economistic approaches. The critical appropriation of these references permitted a more sophisticated understanding of the complexity of collective action.

The Influence of English Social History: Thompson and Hobsbawm

The renewal of labour social history in Brazil owes much to the influence of British Marxists, especially E. P. Thompson and Eric Hobsbawm [9]. They broke with a teleological and structuralist vision of Marxism, which viewed the working class as an almost automatic product of the relations of production, inaugurating a perspective that privileges lived experience, culture, and the agency of historical subjects.

E. P. Thompson, with his monumental work "The Making of the English Working Class" (1963), introduced the concept of "experience" as central to historical analysis. For Thompson, class is not a "thing," a static structure determined by the relations of production, but a historical "happening," an active process of self-formation that occurs at the intersection between material conditions and the consciousness, culture, and values of subjects [9]. Class makes itself as much as it is made by circumstances. This formulation had a revolutionary impact on Brazilian historiography, permitting the overcoming of the economicism and determinism that marked many orthodox Marxist analyses [7, 9].

His concept of the "moral economy of the crowd," developed in the essay "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century" (1971), became a powerful analytical tool for Brazilian historiography [10]. Thompson postulates that popular actions, often viewed as mere irrational "hunger riots," are, in truth, informed by a **collective and traditional notion of justice**, of rights and social obligations that are violated by the new logics of capitalist markets. Popular protests are not merely reactions to hunger, but defences of a **customary right** to fair prices, to access to food, and to a legitimate social order [10]. Brazilian historians, such as Silvia Lara, successfully applied this notion to understand the complex negotiations and forms of resistance in the context of slavery, demonstrating that even the enslaved possessed a sense of customary rights that they actively defended [10]. Thompson's emphasis on agency and culture challenged deterministic views and enriched the study of popular struggles in Brazil, permitting a more nuanced analysis of the intersections between class, race, and gender [10].

The reception of Thompson in Brazil was particularly intense from the 1980s onwards, influencing a generation of labour historians, such as Cláudio Batalha, Alexandre Fortes, and Paulo Fontes, who began to investigate worker cultures, forms of sociability, practices of everyday resistance, and the construction of collective identities [7]. The Thompsonian perspective permitted overcoming the dichotomy between "true class consciousness" and "false consciousness," recognising the legitimacy and rationality of the forms of struggle and organisation that workers actually constructed in their specific historical contexts [7, 9].

Eric Hobsbawm, in turn, is recognised as a historian of social struggles on a global scale [8]. His studies on "primitive rebels" or "pre-political" movements, gathered in the work "Primitive Rebels" (1959) and later in "Bandits" (1969), were fundamental for elevating figures previously marginalised by historiography to the status of historical subjects [5]. Hobsbawm analysed movements such as social banditry, millenarianism, secret societies, and the earliest forms of syndicalism, arguing that, although they did not possess a modern revolutionary ideology or centralised organisation, these movements expressed legitimate forms of protest and resistance against oppression and injustice [5, 8].

Hobsbawm insisted on the necessity of understanding these movements **on their own terms**, considering the meaning that the actors themselves attributed to their actions, rather than judging them by a supposed lack of modern "class consciousness" [5]. He argued that these movements were "pre-political" not because they were inferior or backward, but because they emerged in con-

texts where modern forms of political organisation (parties, unions) were not yet available or were repressed [5, 8]. Although his theses on "social banditry" are the object of intense debate—critics argue that Hobsbawm romanticised figures who were, in many cases, common criminals—his perspective revolutionised the study of popular protests, profoundly influencing the analysis of Brazilian phenomena such as cangaço and the messianic movements of Canudos and Contestado [5].

Antonio Gramsci: Hegemony, Subalternity, and Organic Intellectuals

Although not a historian in the strict sense, Antonio Gramsci exercised a fundamental theoretical influence on the historiography of social struggles in Brazil. His concepts of **hegemony, subalternity, and organic intellectuals**, developed in the "Prison Notebooks," provided sophisticated analytical tools for understanding power relations, the construction of consensus, and the possibilities of social transformation.

The concept of **hegemony** permits understanding how class domination is sustained not only by coercion, but also by **consent**, by the construction of a worldview that naturalises the existing order and incorporates elements of subaltern cultures, neutralising their contestatory potential. Hegemony is always a process, a field of dispute, and is never completely consolidated. This opens space for **counter-hegemony**, the construction of alternative worldviews by subaltern classes.

The concept of **subaltern classes** is particularly relevant for the Brazilian context. Gramsci uses the term to refer to social groups that are excluded from political and economic power, whose history is fragmented and episodic, and who face difficulties in constructing autonomous organisation and collective consciousness. The analysis of social struggles in Brazil must consider the heterogeneity of subaltern classes—workers, peasants, the enslaved and their descendants, women, indigenous peoples—and the difficulties of constructing political unity.

Organic intellectuals are those who emerge from the social classes themselves and articulate their worldviews, organising them politically. In the context of Brazilian social struggles, we can identify organic intellectuals both in anarchist and communist worker leaderships and in peasant leaders, in activists of the Black and feminist movements, and in liberation theologians who supported Base Ecclesial Communities (CEBs) and the Pastoral Land Commission (CPT).

James Scott: Everyday Resistance and Infrapolitics

More recently, the work of James Scott, especially "Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance" (1985) and "Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts" (1990), brought a new perspective to the study of social struggles, emphasising **everyday forms of resistance** and the **infrapolitics** of subalterns.

Scott argues that, in contexts of intense domination, where open resistance is extremely dangerous, subalterns develop subtle and dissimulated forms of resistance: sabotage, slowdowns, theft, dissimulation, rumours, jokes, songs. These practices, although they do not constitute a revolution, erode domination and preserve the dignity and autonomy of the dominated. Scott criticises the tendency of many scholars to value only "heroic" forms of resistance (revolts, strikes, revolutions) and to ignore these everyday practices, which are, in truth, much more common and, in many contexts, more effective.

The concept of "hidden transcripts" refers to the discourses and practices that subalterns develop "offstage," away from the gaze of dominators, where they can express their critique, their anger, and their aspirations. These hidden discourses contrast with "public transcripts," where subalterns

are obliged to perform deference and submission. The analysis of social struggles must be attentive to these two dimensions, recognising that apparent acquiescence may hide latent resistance.

Scott's perspective is particularly relevant for the analysis of slavery in Brazil, of labour relations in the countryside, and of forms of resistance in authoritarian contexts, such as the military dictatorship.

The Political Process Theory: Tilly and Tarrow

From the 1990s onwards, Brazilian academia began to incorporate more systematically North American theories of collective action and contentious politics, notably those of Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow [1]. This approach, known as Political Process Theory (PPT), shifted the focus of analyses from "conditions" (poverty, inequality, exploitation) to the "mechanisms" and "processes" of mobilisation, emphasising strategic interaction between social movements, the State, and other political actors.

Charles Tilly proposed an analytical framework focused on structure, process, and confrontation. His concept of "repertoires of collective action" was particularly influential [2]. Tilly argued that social groups do not invent forms of protest from scratch each time they mobilise; they resort to a limited and historically constructed repertoire of known and legitimated actions (strikes, petitions, demonstrations, occupations, barricades). These repertoires are learnt, transmitted, and adapted over time. The analysis of these repertoires permits understanding how forms of struggle change over time in response to transformations in the State, economy, and society [2]. For example, the transition from the "parochial repertoire" (local, direct actions, such as land invasions and machine-breaking) to the "modular repertoire" (national, organised actions, such as general strikes and mass demonstrations) reflects state centralisation and the nationalisation of politics [2].

Tilly also developed the concept of "contentious politics," defined as episodic, public, and collective interaction between claimants and their objects when: (a) at least one government is a claimant, an object of claims, or a party to the claims; and (b) the claims, if realised, would affect the interests of at least one of the claimants [2]. This broad definition permits analysing a vast range of phenomena, from strikes and demonstrations to revolutions and civil wars, under the same theoretical framework.

Sidney Tarrow, in dialogue with Tilly, deepened the analysis by emphasising the importance of "political opportunity structures" [4]. For Tarrow, the emergence and success of social movements depend not only on the organisational resources and mobilisation capacity of the movements themselves, but also on external factors, such as: the opening or closing of the political system (democratisation, elections, institutional reforms); elite instability (divisions, conflicts, crises of legitimacy); the presence of influential allies (parties, unions, intellectuals, sectors of the Church); the repressive capacity of the State (police force, legislation, willingness to repress) [4].

When opportunity structures open—for example, during a democratic transition—the costs of mobilisation decrease and chances of success increase, incentivising collective action. When they close—for example, during a military coup—mobilisation becomes riskier and tends to ebb or assume clandestine forms [4].

Tarrow also developed the notion of "cycles of contention," periods of intensification of social conflict that encourage the mobilisation of diverse groups, innovation in repertoires of action, diffusion of tactics, and radicalisation of demands [4]. These cycles have their own dynamics: they begin with the mobilisation of a pioneering group, which opens space for others; they reach a peak of intensity; and then they ebb, whether through repression, institutionalisation of demands, or activist exhaustion.

The theory of contentious politics, developed by Tilly, Tarrow, and Doug McAdam, became an important reference for analysing contemporary protest cycles in Brazil, such as the June 2013 demonstrations [6].

Brazilian Historiographical Debates: Popular Classes, Subalternity, and Autonomy

Brazilian historiography on social struggles was also marked by internal debates, which reflect the theoretical and political tensions of the field. A central debate concerns the very terminology used to designate the subjects of struggles: "popular classes," "working classes," "subaltern classes," "the people," "the masses"? Each term carries distinct theoretical and political implications.

The term "popular classes" is broader and more inclusive, encompassing not only the industrial working class, but also informal workers, the unemployed, peasants, favela residents, etc. It avoids the economicism of a definition strictly based on position in the relations of production, but can be criticised for its imprecision.

The term "subaltern classes," of Gramscian inspiration, emphasises the exclusion from political power and the fragmentation of these classes, but also their potentiality to construct counter-hegemony. It is particularly useful for the Brazilian context, marked by social and racial heterogeneity.

Another important debate refers to the autonomy of social movements. To what extent were popular movements in Brazil autonomous, capable of formulating their own demands and strategies, and to what extent were they dependent on external leadership (intellectuals, parties, the Church, the State)? This debate traverses all historiography, from the discussion on the role of anarchist immigrants in the labour movement of the First Republic to the analysis of Vargas "populism" and the role of the Catholic Church in the social movements of the 1970s-1980s.

Works such as "1930: The Silence of the Vanquished," by Edgar De Decca, and "Urban Workers in the Speech of Others," by María Célia Paoli, were fundamental in questioning dominant narratives and giving voice to subaltern subjects, revealing their perspectives, strategies, and forms of resistance, often silenced or distorted by official sources and traditional historiography.

The integration of these different theoretical currents—English social history, Gramscian Marxism, North American collective action theory, and Brazilian historiographical debates—permitted Brazilian historiography a more complete and sophisticated approach, combining the cultural sensitivity and emphasis on agency of English social history with the analytical rigour and focus on strategic interaction with the State of political process theory, and with attention to the specificities of the Brazilian context, marked by slavery, racism, inequality, and state violence.

II. The First Republic (1889-1930): Anarchism, Class Consciousness, and the 1917 Strike

The First Republic (1889-1930) was the stage for the emergence of the organised labour movement in Brazil. In a context of incipient industrialisation (concentrated in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, especially in the textile and food sectors), accelerated urbanisation, complete absence of labour legislation, and an oligarchic State that treated the "social question" as a "matter for the police," urban workers began to forge their identities and forms of struggle [19]. Simultaneously, in the

countryside, messianic movements (Canudos, Contestado) and cangaço erupted, challenging the oligarchic order in distinct ways.

Context: Industrialisation, Urbanisation, and Immigration

The transition from Empire to Republic coincided with profound economic and social transformations. The abolition of slavery (1888) and the policy of mass immigration brought millions of Europeans (Italians, Spaniards, Portuguese, Germans) to Brazil, especially to São Paulo, where coffee production and nascent industry were concentrated [11, 13, 19]. These immigrants, many of whom had already had experiences of struggle and organisation in their countries of origin, became the majority of the industrial workforce in the first decades of the twentieth century [11, 13].

Working conditions in factories were brutal: 12 to 14-hour workdays (reaching 16 hours in some cases), unsanitary environments, absence of any social protection, super-exploitation of child and female labour (who received even lower wages than men), and wages constantly eroded by inflation [11, 13, 19]. Worker housing was precarious, concentrated in overcrowded tenements. The absence of labour rights and police repression of any attempt at organisation completed the picture of exploitation.

Historiographical Debate: "Exogenous" Ideology versus Authentic Response

The historiography of the labour movement of the First Republic is marked by a central debate: the nature and autonomy of this movement. The earliest interpretations, often influenced by a nationalist perspective or orthodox Marxism, tended to emphasise the role of European immigrants as bearers of "exogenous" ideologies—anarchism and socialism [11, 13, 19]. In this view, the Brazilian labour movement would be almost a transplant of European struggles, with little root in local conditions. Brazilian workers (especially Black and mixed-race workers) would be passive or disorganised, and the movement would depend entirely on immigrant leadership.

However, a revisionist historiography, influenced by E. P. Thompson and the renewal of social history, came to argue that, although the ideological and organisational contribution of immigrants was undeniable, the movement was an **authentic and creative response** to extremely precarious working conditions [11, 13, 19]. Anarchism and anarcho-syndicalism were not simply "imported"; they were **appropriated and adapted** to the Brazilian context because they offered a repertoire of action and a worldview that resonated profoundly with the everyday experience of exploitation and distrust towards a repressive and exclusionary State [11, 14].

Historians such as **Boris Fausto**, in "Urban Labour and Social Conflict" (1976), and **Sheldon Leslie Maram**, in "Anarchists, Immigrants, and the Brazilian Labour Movement" (1979), were pioneers in analysing the composition, ideologies, and forms of struggle of the labour movement. **Edgar Carone**, in "Labour Movement in Brazil" (1979-1984), offered a panoramic view of the period. **Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro** and **Michael Hall**, in "The Working Class in Brazil" (1979-1981), assembled fundamental documents and analyses.

Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism: Ideology and Practice

Anarchism was the hegemonic ideology in the Brazilian labour movement until the mid-1920s. It was characterised by: - **Rejection of the State**: The State is seen as an instrument of class domination, which must be abolished, not conquered. - **Direct action**: Strikes, boycotts, sabotage, demonstrations—direct actions by workers, without mediation by parties or parliamentarians. -

Worker autonomy: Workers must organise autonomously, in free unions, without tutelage from the State or parties. - **Federalism**: Decentralised organisation, based on the federation of unions and associations. - **Revolutionary general strike**: The general strike would be the final instrument for overthrowing capitalism and the State, inaugurating a free and egalitarian society [11, 14].

Anarcho-syndicalism was the current of anarchism that emphasised the union as the principal instrument of struggle and organisation of the future society. Unions should not limit themselves to immediate economic demands: they should be schools of revolutionary formation and embryos of the future society [11, 14].

Leaders such as **Edgard Leuenroth** (journalist, editor of the newspaper "A Plebe"), **José Oiticica** (professor, anarchist intellectual), and **Neno Vasco** (Portuguese lawyer, editor of "A Terra Livre") were fundamental for the diffusion of anarchism in Brazil [11, 14].

The worker press played a crucial role in the organisation and political formation of workers. Newspapers such as "**A Plebe**" (São Paulo), "**A Voz do Trabalhador**" (organ of the COB), "**A Terra Livre**" (São Paulo), "**A Lanterna**" (anti-clerical), and dozens of others circulated in factories, worker neighbourhoods, and unions, disseminating news of struggles, political analyses, anarchist literature, and denunciations of exploitation [11, 14].

Organisations such as the **Brazilian Workers' Federation (FOB)**, founded in 1906 at the First Brazilian Workers' Congress (Rio de Janeiro), and later the **Brazilian Workers' Confederation (COB)**, sought to unify struggles under the banner of anarcho-syndicalism [13, 14]. The First Workers' Congress (1906) and the Second Workers' Congress (1913) were important moments of national articulation of the movement.

Strikes and Repression

The period was marked by intense strike activity. Important strikes occurred in 1903 (textiles in São Paulo), 1906 (railway workers), 1907 (dockworkers in Rio de Janeiro), and culminated in the **General Strike of 1917** [11, 12, 14, 19]. Other significant strikes occurred in 1919 and 1920.

State repression was brutal. The **Adolfo Gordo Law** (1907) permitted the summary deportation of foreigners considered "agitators" or "anarchists," without the right to defence [11, 15]. Hundreds of militants were deported. Police raided unions, arrested leaders, beat strikers, and, in some cases, murdered militants. The bourgeois press demonised anarchists as "troublemakers," "undesirable foreigners," and "enemies of order" [11, 14, 15].

The General Strike of 1917: Apex of the Anarchist Movement

The **General Strike of 1917**, in São Paulo, represents the apex and the moment of greatest visibility of the anarchist labour movement in Brazil [15, 18]. What began as a localised strike at the **Crespi Cotton Mill**, in the Mooca neighbourhood, for wage increases, rapidly transformed into a mass movement that paralysed the city [14, 18]. The trigger for this generalisation was state repression: the murder of the young Spanish anarchist worker **José Martinez** by police during a demonstration [14, 15, 18]. His funeral, on 11 July 1917, was transformed into a massive demonstration of approximately 10,000 people, catalysing worker solidarity and unifying the demands [11, 14].

The Committee for Proletarian Defence, formed by anarchist and syndicalist leaders to lead the movement, presented a list of demands that reveals the movement's maturity, combining immediate

demands and broader principles: wage increases of 25% to 35%, an 8-hour workday, an end to child labour (under 14 years), an end to night work for women and minors, job security, respect for the right of association, and the release of imprisoned strikers [14, 18]. The strike, which came to mobilise more than 70,000 workers in São Paulo and spread to other cities (Rio de Janeiro, Porto Alegre, Recife), demonstrated a remarkable capacity for organisation and forced employers and government to negotiate [14]. Although not all demands were immediately met, the strike resulted in wage concessions (increases averaging 20%) and, more importantly, consolidated the perception of the working class as a social actor to be reckoned with [11, 14, 15].

The legacy of the strike was ambiguous. On one hand, it strengthened worker identity and the culture of struggle, demonstrating the viability of the general strike as an instrument of pressure. On the other, it intensified state repression, with the persecution and expulsion of foreign leaders, the raiding of unions, and censorship of the worker press [15]. Ideologically, the impact of the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the subsequent founding of the Communist Party of Brazil (PCB) in 1922 began to displace anarchist hegemony, introducing a more centralised, party-based logic focused on the struggle for state power, which would mark the next phase of social struggles in the country [11, 13]. The PCB criticised anarchist "spontaneism" and "apoliticism," defending the necessity of a vanguard party and the struggle for political power.

Rural Movements: Canudos, Contestado, and Cangaço

Parallel to urban worker struggles, the Brazilian countryside was the stage for large-scale social movements that challenged the oligarchic order and revealed the profound social tensions of the period. These movements, frequently interpreted by traditional historiography as "religious fanaticism" or "banditry," were reassessed in light of Eric Hobsbawm's theories on "primitive rebels" and Thompson's concept of "moral economy" [5].

Canudos (1896-1897): The movement led by Antonio Conselheiro in the backlands of Bahia gathered thousands of poor sertanejos around a religious and egalitarian community that rejected the Republic, taxes, and civil marriage [5]. The community of Canudos represented a threat to the oligarchic order, not only for its ideology, but for its very existence as an alternative to the latifundium and misery. The Republic responded with four military expeditions, the last of which, with more than 5,000 soldiers and heavy weaponry, completely destroyed Canudos, massacring its population. Euclides da Cunha, in "Os Sertões" (1902), immortalised the episode, denouncing the massacre, but also reproducing racial and evolutionist prejudices of the era. Contemporary historiography, influenced by Hobsbawm, interprets Canudos as a millenarian movement, a legitimate form of social protest in a context of exclusion and oppression [5].

Contestado (1912-1916): In southern Brazil, in the region disputed between Paraná and Santa Catarina, another messianic movement erupted, initially led by José Maria (a healer who presented himself as a monk) [5]. The movement gathered thousands of poor peasants, expelled from their lands by the construction of the São Paulo-Rio Grande railway and by the concession of lands to the North American company Brazil Railway Company. The movement combined religious elements (messianism, millenarianism) with social demands (access to land, justice). Repression was brutal, involving the Army and private militias, resulting in thousands of deaths. Contestado reveals the violence of capitalist modernisation in the countryside and the resistance of expropriated peasants [5].

Cangaço: Cangaço, an endemic phenomenon in the northeastern backlands, is the object of intense historiographical debate. Eric Hobsbawm, in "Bandits" (1969), interpreted cangaço as a form

of "social banditry," a primitive rebellion against the oppression of landowners and the State, in which bandits like Lampião (Virgulino Ferreira da Silva) were seen by poor populations as avengers and defenders of the weak [5]. This interpretation was criticised by historians who argue that Hobsbawm romanticised cangaço, ignoring indiscriminate violence, looting, and crimes committed by cangaceiros, who frequently acted in the service of colonels or for their own interests. The debate on cangaço reflects broader tensions about how to interpret forms of protest that do not fit into "modern" models of political struggle [5].

III. The Vargas Era (1930-1945) and the Populism Debate

No period of republican history has generated such intense and polarised historiographical debate as the Vargas Era (1930-1945), especially regarding the relationship between the State and the working class. The Revolution of 1930, which brought Getúlio Vargas to power, marked a rupture with the oligarchic Old Republic and inaugurated a new model of State, more centralised, interventionist, and oriented towards industrialisation. The creation of the Ministry of Labour, Industry, and Commerce (1930), the Consolidation of Labour Laws (CLT) (1943), and the corporatist union structure are incontrovertible facts, but their interpretation profoundly divides analysts. The core of the debate revolves around the concept of populism.

Context: The Revolution of 1930 and Transformations in Labour Relations

The Revolution of 1930 was a response to the crisis of the Old Republic, shaken by the world economic crisis of 1929, the fall in coffee prices, and political tensions between regional oligarchies. Vargas, supported by military sectors, dissident oligarchies (especially from Rio Grande do Sul and Minas Gerais), and the urban middle class, overthrew President Washington Luís and inaugurated a new political period [21, 25].

One of Vargas's first measures was the creation of the Ministry of Labour, headed by Lindolfo Collor, signalling that the "social question" would no longer be treated as a "matter for the police," but as a matter of State [21, 25]. Between 1930 and 1945, especially during the Estado Novo (1937-1945), the Vargas government implemented vast labour and social legislation: - 8-hour workday (1932) - Minimum wage (1940) - Paid holidays - Weekly rest day - Regulation of female and child labour - Social security - Labour Courts (1939) - Consolidation of Labour Laws (CLT) (1943), which gathered and systematised all labour legislation [21, 25, 26].

Simultaneously, Vargas created a corporatist union structure, inspired by Italian fascism, which tied unions to the State. Characteristics of this structure: - **Union monopoly**: Only one union per professional category in each territorial base. - **Official recognition**: Unions needed to be recognised by the Ministry of Labour. - **Union tax**: Mandatory contribution from all workers (unionised or not), equivalent to one day's work per year, passed on to unions by the State. - **State intervention**: The State could intervene in unions, remove leaderships, and control their activities. - **Prohibition of strikes**: During the Estado Novo, strikes were prohibited as "anti-social resources" [21, 25, 30].

The Classical Thesis: Populism as Manipulation and Co-optation

The classical interpretation of populism, consolidated in the 1960s and 1970s and associated primarily with Francisco Weffort, views the phenomenon as a form of domination and manipulation of

urban masses [21, 25]. According to this thesis, developed in works such as "Populism in Brazilian Politics" (1978), the Brazilian working class, largely recently migrated from the countryside and without an autonomous and revolutionary "class consciousness," became a "manoeuvring mass" for charismatic leaders like Getúlio Vargas [25].

In this perspective, the labour and social rights enshrined in the CLT were not a conquest resulting from worker struggle, but a "gift" or bestowal from the State [25]. Vargas's objective would be to neutralise the revolutionary potential of the proletariat, co-opt its leaders, and tie unions to the State, exchanging social rights for political control [25, 30]. Vargas's "labourism" is thus seen as an ideology that obscures class struggle, promoting an image of Vargas as "father of the poor" and the State as a neutral arbiter of conflicts between capital and labour [29].

The populism thesis is inserted into a broader intellectual context, influenced by modernisation theory and the political sociology of the 1960s. It emphasises the fragility of the Brazilian working class, its heterogeneity (composed of rural migrants, immigrants, informal workers), its lack of organisational tradition, and its vulnerability to manipulation. Populism would thus be a form of domination typical of transitional societies, where uprooted and disoriented urban masses seek charismatic leaders who offer them protection and identity [25].

Weffort himself subsequently nuanced his position, admitting that manipulation "was never absolute" and that workers were not completely passive, but the force of his original thesis marked generations of researchers and profoundly influenced Brazilian political debate [25]. The populism thesis was used both by liberals (who criticised Vargas's "paternalism" and "statism") and by sectors of the left (who criticised the "co-optation" and "demobilisation" of the working class).

The Historiographical Revision: The "Labour Pact" and Worker Agency

From the 1980s onwards, a revisionist current, led by historians such as Angela de Castro Gomes and Jorge Ferreira, began to strongly question the manipulation thesis [26, 27]. In works such as "The Invention of Labourism" (1988), Gomes proposes replacing the category of "populism" with that of "labour pact" [21, 26]. This historiographical revision was influenced by the renewal of social history, by the critique of structuralism, and by a reassessment of sources, which came to include the perspective of workers themselves (labour court proceedings, union newspapers, oral history interviews).

This perspective refuses the image of a passive and naive working class. Instead of a "gift," CLT rights are reinterpreted as the result of a complex process of interaction, negotiation, and conflict [21, 26]. Workers and their unions, even within the restrictive corporatist structure, would not have lost their agency. They would have learnt to use institutional channels, such as the Labour Courts, to press for their interests and guarantee the application of the law [21, 26]. Analysis of thousands of labour court proceedings revealed that workers were not passive victims, but actors who knew their rights, took cases to court, and frequently won their cases against employers [26].

"Co-optation," therefore, is reassessed as a two-way process, in which the State sought control, but workers also extracted benefits and conquered spaces [26]. The corporatist union structure, although restrictive, also offered resources (financial, juridical, organisational) that workers used strategically. The union tax, for example, although criticised for its compulsory nature, guaranteed resources for unions, permitting them to maintain permanent structures, hire lawyers, and offer services to workers [26].

For this current, "labourism" was not merely an ideology of manipulation, but a complex field

of symbolic and material disputes. Vargas needed worker support for his political and national development projects, which conferred upon them an unprecedented bargaining power [27]. The very creation of the Brazilian Labour Party (PTB) in 1945, although aimed at channelling worker support and containing communist advance (the PCB had grown significantly at the end of the Estado Novo), also became a vehicle for worker demands in the political system [22]. The PTB, especially under the leadership of João Goulart, became a mass party, with a strong union base, and defended policies of expanding labour rights and social reforms [22].

This debate is not merely academic. It redefines understanding of citizenship in Brazil. Whilst the populism thesis suggests a "regulated" and passive citizenship, granted by the State in exchange for political control (a concept developed by Wanderley Guilherme dos Santos), the labour pact view points to a citizenship constructed in struggle, negotiation, and strategic use of institutions, revealing the complexity and contradictions of conservative Brazilian modernisation [26, 27].

The Communist Uprising (1935) and Repression of the PCB

An important episode of the Vargas Era was the Communist Uprising of 1935, an attempted armed insurrection led by the Communist Party of Brazil (PCB) and the National Liberating Alliance (ANL), a popular front organisation that gathered communists, socialists, tenentistas, and progressive sectors [25]. The ANL, led by Luís Carlos Prestes (former tenentista leader who had joined communism), defended an anti-imperialist, anti-fascist programme and social reforms (agrarian reform, nationalisation of foreign companies, non-payment of external debt) [25].

The insurrection, which erupted in November 1935 in barracks in Natal, Recife, and Rio de Janeiro, was rapidly defeated by government forces. Repression was brutal: thousands of arrests, torture, political purges. Prestes was imprisoned and his companion, Olga Benário, pregnant, was deported to Nazi Germany, where she was murdered in a concentration camp. The PCB was made illegal and harshly repressed [25].

The Uprising served as a pretext for Vargas to intensify authoritarianism, culminating in the Estado Novo coup in 1937, when Vargas closed Congress, cancelled elections, imposed an authoritarian Constitution, and established a dictatorship that would last until 1945 [25, 30]. During the Estado Novo, repression of social movements was total: unions were placed under intervention, strikes prohibited, leaders imprisoned or exiled, and state propaganda exalted Vargas as the "father of the poor" and "saviour of the fatherland" [30].

IV. The Democratic Period (1945-1964): Strikes, Peasant Leagues, and Polarisation

The period between the fall of the Estado Novo (1945) and the military coup (1964) was marked by redemocratisation, the intensification of worker struggles, and the emergence of rural movements that placed agrarian reform at the centre of national debate. It was a period of intense ideological polarisation, influenced by the Cold War, and which ended with the military coup that established a 21-year dictatorship.

Context: Redemocratisation and Industrialisation

The fall of Vargas in 1945, pressured by military sectors and liberal opposition, inaugurated a democratic period. The Constitution of 1946 re-established civil and political rights, guaranteed

union freedom (although maintaining the corporatist structure), and permitted the legalisation of parties, including the PCB (which would be made illegal again in 1947, in the context of the Cold War). The period was marked by the acceleration of industrialisation, especially during the government of Juscelino Kubitschek (1956-1961), with the Target Plan and the construction of Brasília.

Labour Movement: Strikes and Combativeness

The labour movement resurged forcefully in the democratic period. Important strikes marked the period: - **Strike of the 300,000 (1953)**: In São Paulo, during Vargas's second government (1951-1954), more than 300,000 workers from various categories (metalworkers, textile workers, printers, carpenters) stopped their activities demanding wage increases and better working conditions. The strike demonstrated the mobilisation capacity of the labour movement and forced the government to grant increases. - **Strike of the 700,000 (1963)**: During the government of João Goulart (1961-1964), more than 700,000 workers in São Paulo stopped their activities, in one of the largest strikes in Brazilian history until then. The strike occurred in a context of economic crisis, galloping inflation, and political polarisation, and demanded wage adjustments and basic reforms.

The period was also marked by the creation of the General Workers' Command (CGT) in 1962, a union central that sought to unify unions and coordinate struggles. The CGT, although not officially recognised (legislation prohibited union centrals), became an important political actor, supporting Goulart government's basic reforms and mobilising workers.

The debate about peleguismo versus combativeness marked the period. "Pelegos" were union leaders accused of collaborating with employers and government, of using unions for their own benefit, and of demobilising workers. Combative leaders, many linked to the PCB or PTB, sought to mobilise workers for more radical struggles and for basic reforms.

Peasant Leagues: "Agrarian Reform by Law or by Force"

In the countryside, the period was marked by the emergence of the Peasant Leagues, a social movement that placed agrarian reform on the national agenda in an unprecedented manner. The Leagues arose in Pernambuco, in 1955, at Engenho Galiléia, when peasants initially organised as a benefit society to guarantee dignified burials, but rapidly transformed into a movement for land struggle.

Francisco Julião, lawyer and state deputy for the Brazilian Socialist Party (PSB), became the principal leader and spokesman of the Leagues. Under the motto "Agrarian reform by law or by force," the Leagues defended the expropriation of unproductive latifundia and the distribution of land to peasants. The movement spread rapidly throughout the Northeast and other regions, mobilising thousands of peasants.

The Peasant Leagues were the object of intense debate. Conservative sectors and landowners saw them as a communist and revolutionary threat. The left debated the degree of radicalisation of the movement and its relationship with the Cuban Revolution (1959), which had inspired rural movements throughout Latin America. Historians such as Leonilde Sérvolo de Medeiros, in "History of Social Movements in the Countryside," analysed the complexity of the Leagues, their social composition, strategies, and limitations.

Other Rural Movements

Besides the Peasant Leagues, other rural movements emerged in the period: - **ULTAB (Union of Agricultural Labourers and Workers of Brazil)**: Organisation linked to the PCB, founded in 1954, which sought to organise rural workers in unions and fight for labour rights in the countryside. - **Trombas e Formoso (Goiás)**: Movement of squatters led by José Porfírio, which resisted expulsion from their lands by land-grabbers and landowners, coming to form an armed "peasant republic" between 1954 and 1964. - **MASTER (Movement of Landless Farmers, Rio Grande do Sul)**: Movement that organised land occupations in Rio Grande do Sul in the early 1960s. - **First National Congress of Agricultural Labourers and Workers (1961)**: Gathered more than 1,600 delegates from across the country, demonstrating the strength and articulation of rural movements.

The military coup of 1964 brutally repressed all these movements. Leaders were arrested, tortured, murdered, or exiled. The Peasant Leagues were dismantled, and agrarian reform was removed from the political agenda for decades.

V. The Military Regime (1964-1985): Repression and Resurgence of Social Struggles

The military coup of 1964 imposed a severe reflux on social struggles. Repression dismantled unions and popular movements, and the wage squeeze policy of the "economic miracle" deepened exploitation [34]. However, at the end of the 1970s, amidst economic crisis and the process of "slow, gradual, and secure opening," social struggles resurged with renewed force and format, becoming protagonists of the redemocratisation process [34].

Context: Coup, Repression, and "Economic Miracle"

The military coup of 31 March 1964, supported by business sectors, major media, and the United States, overthrew President João Goulart and established a dictatorship that would last 21 years. The official justification was to combat the "communist threat" and restore "order." In practice, the coup aimed to interrupt the basic reforms process, repress social movements, and guarantee favourable conditions for capitalist accumulation.

Repression of social movements was immediate and brutal: - **Intervention in unions**: Hundreds of unions were placed under intervention, leaderships removed, leaders arrested or purged. - **Political purges and imprisonments**: Thousands of political, union, student, and peasant leaders were arrested, tortured, purged, or exiled. - **Repressive legislation**: Institutional Acts (AI-1, AI-2, AI-5), National Security Law, press censorship, prohibition of strikes. - **Wage squeeze**: Economic policy that compressed real wages, transferring income from workers to capital, enabling the "economic miracle" (1968-1973) [34].

During the "economic miracle," Brazil grew at high rates (average 10% per year), but at the cost of super-exploitation of workers, income concentration, and external indebtedness. The dictatorship prohibited strikes, repressed unions, and manipulated inflation indices to reduce wage adjustments [34].

The "New Unionism" and the Rebellion of Labour

The landmark of the resurgence of social struggles were the metalworker strikes in São Paulo's ABC region, from 1978 onwards [34, 38]. This movement, which became known as "new unionism," represented a triple rupture: with the official union structure tied to the State, with the practice of "peleguismo" (union leaders who collaborated with employers and government), and with the dictatorship's wage squeeze policy [34].

The strikes began in an unusual manner: in May 1978, workers at Scania, in São Bernardo do Campo, folded their arms on the factory floor, paralysing production without leaving the workplace, thus avoiding police repression. The strike spread rapidly to other factories (Ford, Volkswagen, Mercedes-Benz) and mobilised tens of thousands of workers [34, 38]. In 1979 and 1980, new strikes, even larger, paralysed the ABC and spread to other regions of the country [34].

The sociologist Ricardo Antunes, in seminal works such as "The Rebellion of Labour" (1988) and "The New Unionism in Brazil" (1995), profoundly analysed this phenomenon [31, 33]. He demonstrated that "new unionism" was characterised by being:

1. **Combative**: Used the strike as the principal instrument of pressure, openly defying the regime's repressive legislation.
2. **Autonomous**: Sought independence from the State, political parties, and employers, breaking with the corporatist union structure.
3. **Democratic and base-oriented**: Decisions were taken in large assemblies, with massive worker participation (assemblies at the Vila Euclides Stadium, in São Bernardo, came to gather 80,000 workers), conferring legitimacy and strength to leaders, such as Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, president of the São Bernardo Metalworkers' Union [34, 38].
4. **Propositional**: Did not limit itself to wage demands; it questioned work organisation, economic policy, and the political regime [34].

The ABC strikes did not demand merely the recovery of wage losses manipulated by the government; they questioned the very economic and political model of the dictatorship [34]. This movement was not restricted to factories. It was the catalyst for the reorganisation of civil society and had direct and fundamental political developments: the founding of the Workers' Party (PT) in 1980, as a party-political expression of this newly organised working class, and the creation of the Unified Workers' Central (CUT) in 1983, which became the largest union central in the country, unifying combative unions at the national level [34].

Urban Social Movements: CEBs, Cost of Living, Housing

Parallel to "new unionism," urban social movements proliferated in the peripheries of major cities, organising around demands for public services, housing, health, and against the high cost of living [41, 45]. These movements, frequently supported by Base Ecclesial Communities (CEBs) of the Catholic Church, influenced by Liberation Theology, represented a new form of popular organisation, more horizontal, territorial, and focused on everyday issues [41].

- **Movement against the cost of living (1978)**: Mobilised thousands of women, especially housewives, against rising food prices and cost of living. The movement organised petitions, demonstrations, and pressured the government.
- **Mothers' clubs and CEBs**: Community organisations, many linked to the Catholic Church, which became spaces of politicisation and popular organisation.

- **Favela movement and struggle for housing**: Resistance to forced removals, struggle for land regularisation and urban infrastructure.
- **Health movement**: Struggle for health posts, medicines, and dignified care in the peripheries.

The sociologist Eder Sader, in "When New Characters Entered the Scene" (1988), analysed these movements, arguing that they represented a renewal of politics, with new subjects (women, periphery residents, favela dwellers), new forms of organisation (horizontal, autonomous), and new agendas (right to the city, quality of life) [41].

Rural Movements: CPT and Agrarian Conflicts

In the countryside, the dictatorship intensified conservative modernisation, favouring agribusiness and land concentration, which generated intense agrarian conflicts and violence against peasants, squatters, and indigenous peoples [50]. In this context, the Pastoral Land Commission (CPT), founded in 1975 by progressive sectors of the Catholic Church, became a fundamental actor in the defence of rural workers [50].

The CPT, led by bishops such as Dom Pedro Casaldáliga and Dom Tomás Balduíno, denounced violence in the countryside, supported the organisation of rural workers, and defended agrarian reform. The CPT documented thousands of cases of murders of peasant leaders, land conflicts, and slave labour [50]. The murder of Chico Mendes, rubber tapper leader and environmentalist, in 1988, symbolised the violence against defenders of land and forest [50].

Student Movement

The student movement, represented by the National Students' Union (UNE), was one of the first to resist the dictatorship. In 1968, the movement reached its apex with the March of the Hundred Thousand in Rio de Janeiro, one of the largest demonstrations against the regime. The dictatorship's response was the AI-5 (Institutional Act No. 5), which inaugurated the "years of lead": complete closure of the regime, suspension of habeas corpus, press censorship, torture, and political assassinations. The UNE was made illegal, and the student movement was brutally repressed. It would only resurge at the end of the 1970s, with the campaign for amnesty and redemocratisation.

VI. Redemocratisation (1985-1989): Diretas Já, the Constituent Assembly, and Consolidation of Movements

The period of redemocratisation (1985-1989) was marked by social effervescence and the consolidation of new social actors who would play a central role in post-dictatorship Brazilian politics. The "Diretas Já" campaign, the Constituent Assembly of 1987-1988, and the promulgation of the 1988 Constitution are fundamental landmarks of this period.

Context: Political Opening and Democratic Transition

The democratic transition in Brazil was "negotiated," that is, it was not the result of a rupture or a revolutionary overthrow of the military regime, but of a gradual process of political opening, controlled by sectors of the military themselves and conservative elites. The "Diretas Já" campaign (1983-1984) mobilised millions of Brazilians in the largest demonstrations in the country's history until then, demanding direct elections for president. Although the Dante de Oliveira amendment,

which proposed direct elections, was rejected by Congress, the campaign marked the symbolic defeat of the military regime.

In 1985, Tancredo Neves was elected president by an indirect electoral college, but died before taking office. José Sarney, vice-president and former supporter of the military regime, assumed the presidency. Despite the frustrations, the period was characterised by the expansion of civil liberties, legalisation of parties (including the PCB and PC do B), and the convening of a Constituent Assembly.

Consolidation of New Unionism and Founding of the CUT

The Unified Workers' Central (CUT), founded in 1983, consolidated itself in this period as the principal union central in the country, gathering combative unions and representing millions of workers [34, 44]. The CUT adopted an autonomous, combative, and democratic strategy, contrasting with other centrals closer to the government or employers.

The period was marked by intense strike activity. The 1980s were the decade with the highest number of strikes in Brazilian history, with workers mobilising for wage recovery, reduction of working hours, job stability, and participation in management decisions [34].

Founding of the Workers' Party (PT)

The Workers' Party (PT), founded in 1980, consolidated itself in the 1980s as the principal party of the Brazilian left, with a base in unions, popular movements, intellectuals, and sectors of the Catholic Church linked to Liberation Theology [44]. The PT represented a novelty in Brazilian politics: a mass party, with internal democracy, built "from the bottom up," by the workers themselves, rather than by political elites.

In the 1989 elections, the first direct elections for president after the dictatorship, Lula (Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva) reached the second round, being defeated by Fernando Collor de Mello in a polarised election marked by media manipulation. Despite the defeat, the PT's candidacy demonstrated the political strength of the new unionism and popular movements.

The Landless Workers' Movement (MST)

The Landless Workers' Movement (MST), founded in 1984, emerged as the principal social movement in the struggle for agrarian reform in Brazil [48, 50]. Heir to the traditions of the Peasant Leagues and to the support of the CPT, the MST innovated in its tactics (land occupations, encampments), organisation (mass-based, democratic), and ideology (combination of Catholic influences with Marxism).

The MST developed a repertoire of contention that combined direct action (occupations) with negotiation and institutionalisation (pressure for government policies, organisation of rural settlements). The visibility achieved by the MST placed agrarian reform once again on the national agenda, after decades of neglect [48, 50].

Black, Feminist, LGBT, and Environmentalist Movements

The 1980s also witnessed the consolidation of identity movements that would play an increasingly important role in Brazilian politics:

- **Black Movement**: The Unified Black Movement (MNU), founded in 1978, denounced structural racism in Brazilian society and fought for public policies of affirmation. The 1980s saw the strengthening of Black organisations and the inscription of racism as an "unbailable crime" in the 1988 Constitution [45].
- **Feminist Movement**: Brazilian feminism, which had resurged in the 1970s, expanded in the 1980s, with the creation of Women's Police Stations, the National Council for Women's Rights, and the inscription of gender equality in the Constitution [45].
- **LGBT Movement**: Although still incipient, the LGBT movement began to organise in the 1980s, in the context of the AIDS epidemic, which mobilised the community and generated new forms of activism [45].
- **Environmentalist Movement**: Environmental struggles gained strength in the 1980s, especially in the Amazon, where rubber tapper leader Chico Mendes became a symbol of resistance against deforestation. His murder in 1988 had international repercussions and strengthened the environmentalist cause [50].

The 1988 Constituent Assembly and the "Citizen Constitution"

The Constituent Assembly of 1987-1988 was a landmark of popular participation in the construction of the legal framework. Social movements, unions, NGOs, and citizen organisations mobilised to influence the elaboration of the new Constitution, through "popular amendments" signed by thousands of citizens.

The 1988 Constitution, dubbed the "Citizen Constitution," represented significant advances in social rights: universal health (SUS), free and quality public education, social security, labour rights, protection of the environment, recognition of indigenous rights, and criminalisation of racism. The Constitution also expanded political participation, with the inclusion of mechanisms such as plebiscite, referendum, and popular initiative [44, 48].

The inscription of these rights in the Constitution was a direct result of popular mobilisation during the redemocratisation process. However, the effective realisation of these rights would remain an ongoing struggle in subsequent decades.

VII. Final Considerations: Legacies, Achievements, and Historiographical Challenges

The trajectory of social struggles in Republican Brazil, from 1889 to 1989, reveals a rich and complex history of resistance, organisation, and transformation. The historiographical analysis of this period allows us to identify continuities and ruptures, achievements and limitations, and the permanent tension between structures of domination and the agency of subaltern classes.

Legacies and Achievements

Among the principal legacies of social struggles in the period analysed, we can highlight:

1. **Construction of collective identities**: Worker, peasant, Black, feminist, and other movements contributed to the construction of collective identities that permitted political mobilisation and the formulation of demands.

2. **Conquest of rights**: From the CLT in the Vargas Era to the social rights of the 1988 Constitution, many conquests of the Brazilian welfare state resulted from the struggles and pressures of social movements.

3. **Democratisation of society**: Social struggles contributed to the democratisation of Brazilian society, not only in the political sense (transition from dictatorship to democracy), but also in the sense of expanding citizenship and political participation.

4. **Construction of organisations**: Unions, parties, movements, and NGOs built during this period continue to be important actors in Brazilian politics, although with transformations and challenges.

Historiographical Challenges

The historiography of social struggles in Brazil faces important challenges:

1. **Integration of perspectives**: The integration of perspectives of class, race, gender, and other dimensions of inequality remains a challenge. If the historiography has advanced significantly in the analysis of the labour movement, the history of Black, indigenous, feminist, and LGBT movements remains relatively less developed.

2. **Subaltern voices**: Despite advances, the recovery of subaltern voices remains a methodological challenge. Many movements left few written records, and oral history, although fundamental, has limitations.

3. **Comparative analysis**: Comparative analysis with other Latin American countries and other regions of the world can enrich understanding of the specificities and similarities of Brazilian social struggles.

4. **Connections with the present**: Understanding the connections between the struggles of the past and contemporary challenges—such as the precarisation of labour, violence in the countryside, urban inequalities, and identity demands—is fundamental for a historiography that dialogues with the present.

Conclusion

The history of social struggles in Republican Brazil is a history of resistance, creativity, and transformation. Subaltern classes, despite structures of domination and repression, demonstrated throughout a century their capacity for organisation, mobilisation, and pressure. The analysis of this history, through the different theoretical and historiographical lenses examined in this report, permits a deeper and more nuanced understanding of Brazilian society, its tensions, contradictions, and possibilities for transformation.

The dialectic between structure and agency, between domination and resistance, between cooptation and autonomy, remains the guiding thread for understanding not only the past, but also the challenges of the present and the future. The historiography of social struggles, in its critical and reflective dimension, is thus not merely an academic exercise, but a contribution to political reflection and democratic practice.

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