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Populism in Brazil: from Getúlio to Lula

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In Latin America (and elsewhere) populism has been, and continues to be, an elusive concept, notoriously difficult to define, and highly contested, both in the study of political history and contemporary politics. It has often been said that more has been written about definitions of populism than about populism itself.

Populism is perhaps best and most simply defined as encompassing those political movements/parties and, above all, those ‘charismatic’/personalist/ opportunistic/demagogic politicians, self-styled ‘outsiders’ (though mainly from the elite), who reach power (usually, though not always, through elections), exercise power and retain power through some kind of direct or quasi-direct, unmediated relationship and identification with previously politically unorganized, politically excluded, sections of the population which are politically mobilized for the first time – that is to say, mobilized by ‘populists’ *from above*.

For the so-called ‘classical populists’, from, say, the 1930s to the 1960s, and the beginnings of mass politics in Latin America, it was the new and newly enfranchised urban working class and public sector white-collar urban lower middle class that was available for political mobilization. (The mass of the rural poor were largely ignored since they had no vote - often a consequence of illiteracy - or their votes were delivered to local landowners

and political bosses.)

The so-called 'neo-populists', of both Right and Left, emerged from the late 1980s, in conditions of economic and social crisis, after many political scientists and sociologists had announced the end of populism in Latin America. They extended the social base of populism by mobilizing the previously politically unorganized and excluded low income and ill educated marginal sectors of the population, both urban and rural (including in many countries the indigenous populations). Bypassing established political parties which had proved ineffective in articulating or responding to the social demands of the poor they created new social and political movements which successfully contested democratic elections.

Ideologically, populism (and neo-populism) was, and is, eclectic, vague, confused - and not to be taken too seriously. Populist discourse or rhetoric is built, simplistically, around a fundamental antagonism between the 'people', loosely defined, and the established structures of power in the hands of an 'elite' or 'oligarchy', equally loosely defined, and more often than not around nationalist hostility to 'imperialists' (i.e. the United States).

Populist governments, however, have generally not only fostered political inclusion (though not empowerment), but also, at least in the case of the classical populists and the neo-populists of the Left, delivered some measure of social justice through a (mostly limited) distribution of wealth and welfare provision for their social base, even if this has invariably proved fiscally irresponsible from a strictly macro-economic point of view. (Dornbusch and Edwards in 1991 famously defined economic populism as 'the short term pursuit of growth and income distribution at the cost of inflation and large fiscal deficits'). The neo-populists of the Right in the 1990s, on the other hand, implemented 'neo-liberal' agendas that did little

to improve the condition of the poor who had elected them.

Two aspects of populism (and neo-populism) deserve greater attention:

1. Populism and the Left.

For some historians, the populist leaders and regimes of Latin America in the period from the 1930s to the 1960s were sufficiently reformist (and nationalist) to be considered part of the Left, broadly defined. The history of the Socialist and Communist parties of Latin America in this period was predominantly a history of failure. Only Chile and Argentina (before the Second World War) had significant Socialist parties which achieved a measure of electoral success. The Latin American Communist parties, except for one brief period only between the end of the Second World War and the beginning of the Cold War, were for the most part small, isolated, illegal - and heavily repressed; they had little success in either promoting revolution (though the Cuban Communist party was able to capture the Revolution of 1959) or attracting electoral support. Thus it is to a large extent true that the political space occupied in Europe by parties of the Communist and Socialist/Social Democratic Left - and in the United States by New Deal Democrats? - was occupied in Latin America by populists. Populist politicians and regimes, however, were generally more in favour of maintaining the status quo, at best modestly reformist, rather than committed to social, much less socialist, transformation. They were for the most part hostile to the Socialist and Communist Left, and the Socialist and Communist Left was hostile to them. Some historians have compared them more with the European leaders and regimes of the fascist Right.

The neo-populists of the Left in the first decade of the twenty-first century have been equally opposed to, and opposed by, the traditional parties of the Left, which were, of course,

even weaker now than in the middle decades of the twentieth century. But in view of the persistence of extreme poverty and extreme inequality in Latin America – indeed their worsening during the 1980s and 1990s – and appealing to a social base consisting of those increasingly regarded as the victims of neo-liberalism and globalization, the neo-populists have adopted radical anti-poverty programmes and distributive social policies, especially in health and education. Some describe themselves as 21st century socialists.

2. Populism and democracy.

Elected or otherwise, populist leaders of the ‘classical’ period were invariably authoritarian and at best ambivalent toward such liberal democratic institutions as existed at the time.

The ‘neo-populists’, governing in the name of the ‘people’, a single, homogeneous ‘people’, have been equally authoritarian, impatient with existing democratic institutions (established opposition parties, Congress), the judiciary, the media, etc, all of which they regard as fundamentally anti-popular. At the same time in some cases they have fostered radical experiments in direct, participatory forms of democracy – at the cost, it could be argued, of weakening, perhaps destroying, representative democracy.

I Brazil 1930-64¹

In the historical literature on so-called ‘classical’ populism in Latin America, from the 1930s to the 1960s, Getúlio Vargas is always given a prominent place (usually, and unhelpfully, alongside Cárdenas and Perón). But was Vargas a populist? In 1942-5 perhaps, after he had already been in power for more than a decade, and again from 1950 until his

¹ This section draws on my chapters in the *Cambridge History of Latin America*: Leslie Bethell, ‘Politics in Brazil under Vargas, 1930-1964’ and ‘Politics in Brazil under the Liberal Republic, 1945-1964’, in Leslie Bethell (ed.), *Cambridge History of Latin America*, vol. IX *Brazil since 1930* (Cambridge, 2008).

suicide in August 1954.

Getúlio Vargas first came to power in Brazil, aged 48, in November 1930. Governor of Rio Grande do Sul he was the defeated 'opposition' candidate in the presidential elections of March 1930 (in which only ten per cent of the adult population had voted). An armed rebellion by dissident members of the political oligarchy and disaffected junior army officers triggered a *golpe* by senior army generals and the transfer of power to Vargas. Although there was a certain amount of popular discontent at the time, particularly as the first effects of the World Depression began to be felt, and some enthusiasm for regime change, in the Federal District (Rio de Janeiro) at least, popular forces played only a minor role in the 'Revolution' of 1930. What Louis Couty, a French resident in Rio de Janeiro, had famously written almost fifty years earlier remained essentially true: 'O Brasil não tem povo/Brazil has no people', that is to say, no popular forces that could be effectively mobilized for significant political, economic and social change. At this stage in his career Vargas saw little potential in popular political mobilisation. *O povo* (the people) were political spectators, not political actors.

Vargas was head of a provisional government from November 1930 to July 1934. He was then elected president by Congress for a fixed four-year term under the Constitution of 1934 (although from November 1935 he governed under a state of siege). During this period he first advanced and then destroyed the political careers of the first two politicians to be called 'populist' in Brazil: Pedro Ernesto Baptista and José Américo de Almeida.

Pedro Ernesto Baptista, a distinguished medical doctor, had played a prominent role in the 'Revolution' of 1930. In September 1931 Vargas appointed him *interventor* in the Federal District, and in April 1935 he was (indirectly) elected *prefeito*. The first politician in the history of Rio de Janeiro to appeal directly to the urban poor for political support with

populist rhetoric and the first to make use of radio, Pedro Ernesto initiated a programme of poverty alleviation, welfare for the poor, reform of health and education and state ownership of basic utilities. Sympathetic to the Communist-supported *Aliança Nacional Libertadora* he became a victim of the repression that followed the attempted Communist putsch of November 1935. In April 1936 he was removed from office and sentenced to three years in jail. He was released in September 1937, but was now in poor health. He died of cancer aged 58 in August 1942. Huge crowds occupied the streets for his funeral.²

José Américo de Almeida, a writer (the author of the classic social novel of the Northeast. *A bagaçeira*, 1928), one of the leaders of the ‘Revolution’ in the Northeast and a minister on the Provisional Government, became in 1937 the ‘candidato oficial’ in the presidential elections scheduled for January 1938. But he never had the full support of Vargas, who in truth had no interest in any candidate as his successor. During the election campaign, José Américo emerged as something of a radical populist. In his various ‘caravanas eleitorais’ he not only defended political rights and civil liberties and criticised personalist presidentialism but attacked the opposition candidate Armando Sales as elitist and conservative, as the candidate of the *paulista* plutocracy, serving the interests of foreign capital. He presented himself as the candidate of the poor and forgotten’ (‘os pobres e deserdos’) as well as the ‘camadas médias’, denouncing the conditions under which most Brazilians lived and promising to improve public services, especially housing and transport, break up the large landed estates, extend social welfare provision and distribute wealth. Like Pedro Ernesto, José Américo was eventually accused of having Communist sympathies, and he had already been forced to withdraw his candidacy when the elections were in any case

² Michael L. Conniff, *Urban politics in Brazil. The rise of populism 1925-1945* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 1981) is, above all, a study of the political career Dr Pedro Ernesto.

aborted by the *golpe* of November 1937 which established the Estado Novo and the dictatorship of Vargas.³

The Estado Novo (1937-45) created a new relationship with organised labour - both workers in manufacturing industry class and white-collar public employees, heavily concentrated in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. (And by 1945 a quarter of Brazil's urban labour force - half a million workers - was unionised.) Repression was replaced by co-optation. On the one hand, unions lacked autonomy and were subordinate to the state; workers were not permitted to engage in political activity, nor to strike, On the other hand, unions were legally recognised and union leaders had some (limited) political influence; there were regular wage increases, a national minimum wage was introduced, and limited social welfare benefits (pensions, medical care, etc) were extended to increasing numbers of industrial workers and civil servants and their dependents.

As pressure for political change, for 'democratisation', increased towards the end of the Second World War the Estado Novo moved from co-optation to mobilization. *Trabalhismo* was invented by a regime that began to recognise the political potential, the future electoral weight, of organised labour, in a different, more open political system. From October 1942 in his ten-minute weekly broadcast to Brazilian workers, 'A Hora do Brasil', published in *A Manhã* the following morning, Alexandre Marcondes Filho, the Minister of Labour, emphasised 'a grande obra trabalhista do presidente Vargas', Brazil's advanced social legislation, the new economic and social rights conceded to labour, the close connection between president and *povo*. At mass meetings, usually held in football stadiums, Getúlio Vargas, 'o pai dos pobres', addressed 'os trabalhadores do Brasil' and 'o povo

³ There is no scholarly study of José Américo de Almeida. But see Aspásia Camargo et al., *O golpe silencioso: as origens da república corporativa* (Rio de Janeiro, 1989).

brasileiro'.⁴ As early as 1942 the political scientist Karl Loewenstein had written that 'Vargas has won the soul of the common man'.⁵ There was nothing in his past, or indeed in his personality, to suggest that Vargas could be projected as a charismatic populist leader, but the ground had been prepared for a dramatic change of direction in 1945.

It is not clear whether Vargas, who had been president continuously since 1930 but never directly elected, intended or hoped to offer himself for election at the end of the Second World War. Certainly he was impressed by Roosevelt's re-election (for the fourth time) in November 1944. Vargas controlled the state apparatus (the military, the police, the state interventores, the municipal prefeitos, the bureaucracy and the judiciary.) He could count on considerable political support from the non-export-orientated sectors of the rural oligarchy, from the industrialists, from the urban lower middle class, especially in the public sector, and now, if there were to be elections, Vargas believed, with justifiable confidence, that he had the support of organised labour. The intensification of state propaganda through the Departamento da Imprensa e Propaganda (DIP), aimed at reminding Brazilian workers of their economic and social gains under the Estado Novo, has been seen as in effect the beginnings of an electoral campaign.

Under the Electoral Law of 28 May 1945 presidential and congressional elections were scheduled for 2 December. All literate men and women over 18 would have the right to vote; the vote would be obligatory; and while voter registration was generally by individual initiative complete lists of employees in both the public and the private sectors (including many who were in fact illiterate) could be registered. All this was designed to expand

⁴ See the classic work by Angela de Castro Gomes, *A invenção do trabalhismo* (Rio de Janeiro, 1988).

⁵ Karl Loewenstein, *Brazil under Vargas* (New York, 1942), p. 339

significantly the political participation of the urban lower middle class and working class while maintaining the severe restrictions on the participation of the (mostly illiterate) rural population. The electorate grew from 10 per cent to 35 per cent of the adult population. For the first time in Brazilian politics the working class vote would be decisive in an election.

Vargas founded the *Partido Trabalhista Brasileiro* (PTB) and urged Brazilian workers to join it. But whereas the two 'conservative' parties established in 1945 nominated candidates for the presidency, the PSD an army general, the UDN an air force brigadier, the PTB did not. Vargas, however, encouraged public debate of the idea of a third candidate, a 'civilian candidate of the people'. João Batista Luzardo, who had reason to know, later argued that, as in 1937, 'Vargas só tinha uma tertius: ele mesmo' [Vargas had only one third candidate in mind: himself].

The six months from May to October 1945 witnessed an unprecedented level of political mobilisation in Brazil's major cities orchestrated in part by the Communists (PCB) but more particularly by a new political movement *Queremismo*, formed around the slogan 'Queremos Getúlio [We want Getúlio]'. Behind the movement were the propaganda machine of the Estado Novo (the DIP), government ministers, leading officials of the Ministry of Labour and the social welfare institutions, government approved union leaders (the *pelegos*), national and state leaders of the PTB, some 'progressive' businessmen, notably the industrialist, banker and commodity speculator Hugo Borghi - the 'fascist gang', as the British embassy liked to call them. Vargas insisted that he was not a candidate, but banners appeared carrying the slogan 'Getúlio diz não ser candidato, mas o povo o quer [Getúlio says he is not a candidate, but the people want him]'. Mass demonstrations on a scale never seen before in Brazil were organised in Rio de Janeiro during August, September and

October.⁶

The key questions to which there are no satisfactory answers for lack of evidence concern Vargas's own involvement in the Queremista movement and its objectives. It is scarcely credible, as is sometimes claimed, that he knew nothing of it. Did he actually promote or merely tolerate it? Certainly he did nothing to stop it. Was Vargas's nomination as presidential candidate - and subsequent electoral victory - the aim? Or were they (was he) preparing the ground for a populist coup?

In the end, Vargas did not become a candidate, whatever the temptation. And to ensure that elections were held on schedule in December 1945, the military removed him from power October. In the presidential elections, the late, and somewhat reluctant, support offered by Vargas to his former Minister of War was crucial for his victory. ('Trabalhadores do Brasil: O general Dutra merece vossos votos'.) In the Congressional elections (in which candidates were allowed to run in more than one state), Vargas was elected senator in Rio Grande do Sul and in São Paulo and federal deputy in the Federal District (the city of Rio de Janeiro) and in six other states, accumulating a total of 1.3 million votes. Over one fifth of the Brazilian electorate voted for him. He chose to serve as senator for his home state, Rio Grande do Sul.

Under the post-war Liberal Republic (1945-64), sometimes called the Populist Republic, as a result of the growth of Brazil's population (from 40 million in 1940 to 70 million in 1960), urbanisation (35 per cent of the population was officially classified as urban in 1940, 45 per cent in 1960), some modest improvement in literacy rates and higher levels of

⁶ See Leslie Bethell, 'Brazil', in Leslie Bethell and Ian Roxborough (eds), *Latin America between the Second World War and the Cold War, 1944-1948* (Cambridge, 1992). Also John French, 'The populist gamble of Getulio Vargas in 1945: political and ideological transitions in Brazil', in David Rock (ed.), *Latin America in the 1940s. War and post war transitions* (Berkeley, 1994).

voter registration, the electorate grew from 7.5 million in 1945 to 18.5 million, more than a half of the adult population, in 1962. And since voting was obligatory, the turn out in elections was high. With the principal, virtually the only, party of the Left, the PCB, illegal from May 1947, new possibilities were opened up for populist politics.

In February 1949, in a famous interview with the journalist Samuel Wainer in O Jornal, Vargas was reported as saying, looking ahead to the presidential election of October 1950, 'Sim, eu voltarei, não como líder político, mas como líder de massas'. The PTB had electoral strength in the Federal District (Rio de Janeiro) and in Rio Grande do Sul, but this was not enough to win the presidency. In particular, the PTB had never really penetrated the state of São Paulo (which accounted for 20 per cent of the electorate). Governor Ademar de Barros, on the other hand, as we shall see, had built up a powerful political machine there, the PSP, and together Getúlio and Ademar formed a Frente Popular against the PSD and UND and the 'elite'. Vargas won the election with 48 per cent of the valid vote in a three-way contest, no less than a quarter of his votes coming from São Paulo (where he won 64 per cent of the vote). But he had in the end campaigned for the most part above parties and he owed his victory to his direct, personal appeal to unionised workers, industrialists, professionals and intellectuals, and the people in general (at least those who had the vote) based on his record as president/dictator (before he flirted with populism in 1945) and his project for further economic development and social reform.

The Vargas administration (1951-4) was all-party and essentially conservative. The decision to create a state company, Petrobras, with a monopoly over oil reserves and their extraction, however, and the nationalist campaign launched under the slogan 'O petróleo é nosso' to guarantee its passage through Congress, generated possibly the greatest level of

urban popular mobilisation seen thus far in Brazil. And in the second half of his mandate Vargas attempted to strengthen his links to organised labour with the appointment of João Goulart as Minister of Labour. Goulart, a young (34 year old) rancher and politician from São Borja in Rio Grande do Sul, Vargas's birth place, and personally close to Vargas, had been since 1952 national president of the PTB. He had the reputation, largely unwarranted, of being a radical *trabalhista*, in favour of establishing in Brazil a *república sindicalista*, an admirer of Perón in Argentina.

In February 1954 Vargas publicly praised Goulart as an 'incansável amigo e defensor dos trabalhadores' and implemented a 100 per cent increase in the minimum wage, together with improvements in social welfare provision and pensions. He also announced that he would extend existing labour legislation to rural workers, ending his speech with this provocative statement: 'Constituis a maioria. Hoje estais com o governo. Amanhã sereis o governo'[You [the workers of Brazil] constitute a majority. Today you are with the government. Tomorrow you will be the government]'. Vargas was, however, forced to dismiss Goulart. And the pressure mounted for his own resignation. It was alleged by his enemies on the Right that he had dictatorial ambitions. Under the Constitution of 1946 he could not be re-elected in 1955, but they recalled the political events of November 1937 and October 1945. To avoid being removed from office by the military a second time, Vargas committed suicide on 24 August.

Whatever the element of personal tragedy, Vargas's suicide was, and was intended to be, a political bombshell. Vargas left a *carta-testamento*, one of the most famous documents in Brazilian history. Vargas had always been, he said, a slave of the people ('um escravo do povo'). He had returned to power in 1950-1 in the arms of the people ('nos braços do povo')

and had sought to defend the people and particularly the very poor ('os humildes') against the powerful interests ('os poderosos interesses') impeding his efforts to govern the country in the national interest and the interests of the people. Now, old and tired ('velho e cansado'), he was serenely ('serenamente') taking the first step on the road to eternity, leaving life to enter History ('dou o primeiro passo no caminho da eternidade e saio da vida para entrar na História').⁷ If ever there was a populist document....

Vargas's letter, which was immediately broadcast on Radio Nacional and later published in all the newspapers, had an enormous popular impact. Hundreds of thousands of Brazilians went onto the streets of Rio de Janeiro, Porto Alegre, Belo Horizonte, Recife and other cities. There were scenes of extreme emotion (and some violence). In Rio huge crowds accompanied Vargas's body to Santos Dumont airport for transportation to Rio Grande do Sul and burial at São Borja. It was Vargas's suicide that produced *getulismo*, and gave it a long life.

São Paulo, Brazil's most populous and economically developed state, provides two examples of populism in this period: the political careers of Ademar de Barros and Jânio Quadros. Better examples perhaps than Getúlio Vargas....

Ademar de Barros, *paulista* coffee fazendeiro and industrialist, state *interventor* during the Estado Novo, formed in July 1946 the Partido Social Progressista (PSP) from three small *paulista*-led parties – the Partido Republicano Progressista, the Partido Popular Sindicalista and the Partido Agrário Nacional - as a political vehicle for himself in a state where interestingly (and significantly) all three major parties, PSD, UDN and PTB, were relatively weak. Projecting a 'man of the people' populist image, with a powerful anti-elite

⁷ See José Murilo de Carvalho, 'As duas mortes de Getúlio Vargas', in *Pontos e bordados* (Belo Horizonte, 1998).

message to a mass lower class following, and spending on a massive scale, Ademar became in January 1947 São Paulo's first popularly elected governor. *Ademarismo* was born.⁸ In office he made liberal use of public funds; he was not ashamed to campaign on the slogan 'ele rouba mas faz [he steals but he gets things done]'. But in 1954, in a second attempt to become governor, Ademar lost narrowly to another populist, Jânio Quadros. In 1955 he ran for president, coming third with 26 per cent of the vote, but winning in both São Paulo and the Federal District. In 1957 he was elected *prefeito* of São Paulo city. In 1960 he was again a candidate for president, this time, however, polling only 19 per cent of the national vote and losing heavily to his nemesis Jânio Quadros. But in 1962 he was again elected governor of São Paulo – defeating Quadros. Two years later, with the overwhelming support of the *paulista* middle-class, Ademar de Barros provided civilian backing for the 1964 *golpe*.

Jânio Quadros, a provincial *matogrossense* turned *paulista* outsider, began meteoric political career when he stood for *vereador* in the municipal council of São Paulo at the age of 30 in 1947. In 1950 he became a state deputy, with the most votes of any candidate. In March 1953, he won a famous victory against the candidate backed by all three major parties to become *prefeito* of São Paulo, the first state capital to elect mayor by direct popular vote – after eight nominated mayors since 1945. Finally, in October 1954, after only eight years in politics and 18 months as mayor, Quadros was elected governor of the state, again without the formal support of any of the three major parties, defeating his main rival for the popular vote, Ademar de Barros (PSP), though only narrowly, 660,000 votes to 642,000. In these two elections Quadros, who never had the full support of organised urban labour, had

⁸ See John D. French, 'Workers and the rise of Adhemarista populism in São Paulo, Brazil 1945-47', *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 68/1, 1988, pp. 2-43. Also Regina Sampaio, *Adhemar de Barros e o PSP* (São Paulo, 1982).

successfully mobilised the poor of the peripheries of the city of São Paulo and other major cities in the state of São Paulo. *Janismo* was Brazil's first taste of mass populism based on the support of the urban poor for a charismatic politician with a strong ethical (anti-corruption) as well as anti-elite message.

In the presidential election of October 1960, Jânio Quadros became the candidate of a Centre-Right coalition of five parties led by the conservative UDN, his earlier radical populism apparently abandoned. His campaign for president was remarkable, even by his own standards, for its ideological confusion. A contradictory and enigmatic personality, Jânio was supported by many *empresários*, especially those linked to foreign capital, and the urban middle class, but also the 160 *sindicatos* affiliated to the Movimento Renovação Sindical and the 'people' more generally to whom he offered (for example, in his speech to a crowd of 100,000 in Recife in September) nationalist-populist *reformas de base*, including the extension of social legislation to rural workers, and a foreign policy which included support for the Cuban Revolution. He won the election with 5.6 million votes (48.3 per cent of the valid vote, slightly better than Vargas in 1950), more than half provided by one state, São Paulo.

Jânio Quadros had built a political career, which had taken him from municipal councilman in São Paulo to President of the Republic in 14 years, on the margins of the party system, without an ideology or programme or even much of an organisation. He had a mandate for change, although apart from cleaning up politics and administration it was not clear what kind of change. He had raised great hopes for the future, but it was not clear what kind of future. In the presidency, he was arrogant and authoritarian. He largely ignored the rules of the political game. He believed he could govern without Congress since 'o povo está

comigo (the people are with me)’. He did not negotiate with, nor try to co-opt, his opponents. Even his allies were uncomfortable with his more ‘populist’ or ‘progressive’ policies which included anti-trust legislation, controls on the remittances of profits abroad and, surprisingly, agrarian reform and even political reform to give illiterates the vote, and with his independent, anti-imperialist Third World foreign policy which included restoring diplomatic relations with Soviet Union, establishing commercial relations with East Germany and the Eastern bloc and, above all, closer relations with Cuba.

In August 1961, after only seven months in power, Jânio Quadros astonished the country by resigning, apparently believing that he would return, like Getúlio in January 1951 or De Gaulle in France in December 1958, ‘nos braços do povo’. But, though it had not opposed him while he was in power, the military failed to support him in his hour of need. Congress moved quickly to ensure that he did not return. And no popular support materialised. The *povo* were shocked, perplexed, to Jânio’s disappointment ‘muito passivo’. ‘The people, where are the people?’ (‘O povo, onde está o povo?’), he is said to have exclaimed forlornly when he arrived from Brasília at Cumbica airport in São Paulo, prepared for exile.⁹

Other Brazilian politicians frequently described in the literature as ‘populist’ include: Leonel Brizola, elected mayor of Porto Alegre in ???, governor of Rio Grande do Sul in 1958 and federal deputy for Guanabara (the city of Rio de Janeiro) in 1962; Miguel Arraes elected Governor of Pernambuco in 1963; João Goulart, twice elected vice-president, 1955 and 1960,

⁹ For an excellent recent account of Quadros’ political career, though more journalistic than academic, see Ricardo Arnt, *Jânio Quadros. O prometeu de Vila Maria* (Rio de Janeiro, 2004). Also Vera Chaia, *A liderança política de Jânio Quadros* (São Paulo, 1991).

who became president in September 1961 by the accident of Jânio's *renúncia*.¹⁰

The *golpe* of 1964 was as much anti-'populist' as anti-'communist'?¹¹

II Brazil 1985-2010

The transition to civilian rule in 1985, after 21 years of military dictatorship, and the beginning of the process of democratisation brought the return of the many of the old state and municipal 'populists': Leonel Brizola, elected governor of the state of Rio de Janeiro in 1982 and 1990; Jânio Quadros, elected mayor of Sao Paulo in 1985; and Miguel Arraes, elected governor of Pernambuco in 1994. And the first presidential election since the military dictatorship, the first ever based on universal suffrage (Brazil's illiterates had finally been given the vote in 1985), brought to power a politician usually bracketed with Carlos Menem in Argentina and Alberto Fujimori in Peru as a 'neo-populist', a 'neo-populist of the Right': Fernando Collor de Mello.¹²

Fernando Collor de Mello, a hitherto virtually unknown politician from a traditional oligarchical family with interests in the media, was the 37-year-old governor of the northeastern state of Alagoas, the second smallest and second poorest state in Brazil. He had no significant party behind him (the *Partido da Reconstrução Nacional* –PRN– was created only months before the election). He ran a traditional political campaign, holding hundreds of rallies throughout Brazil, but with modern marketing techniques (sophisticated promotional

¹⁰ Guita Grin Debert, *Ideologia e populism* (Sao Paulo, 1979) is a study of four Brazilian 'populists': Adhemar de Barros, Arraes, Brizola and Lacerda (sic). Michael L. Conniff, 'Brazil's Populist Republic and beyond', in Conniff (ed.), *Populism in Latin America* (Tuscaloosa, 1999) examines the politics of eight populists: Vargas, Pedro Ernesto, Adhemar de Barros, Quadros, Juscelino Kubitschek (sic), Brizola, Arraes, Collor de Mello. Are we not in danger of further devaluing an already slippery concept?

¹¹ The original Portuguese title of Octavio Ianni's well know study of the 1964 *golpe* *Crisis in Brazil* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1970) was *O colapso do populism no Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro, 1968).

¹² We still await the first serious study of the Collor de Mello phenomenon. But see Mario Sérgio Conti, *Notícias do Planalto: A imprensa e Fernando Collor* (São Paulo, 1999).

material, extensive use of surveys and expensive television programs, presenting himself as a young, attractive and energetic 'outsider'. He made powerful speeches against the traditional politicians who represented the Brazilian elite, even though the political and economic elite, which after the 21-year military dictatorship had no credible candidate of its own, generally backed him. And, in particular, he strongly denounced corruption in public and private life (which is ironic in view of what was to come).

The Brazilian electorate now numbered 82 million (in a population of almost 150 million) - compared with only 15 million in 1960. 72.3 million voted, of whom 70 per cent were voting for a president for the first time. Collor won in the first round of the election with 30.5 per cent of the valid vote (20.6 million votes) and in the second round run-off against Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva 53 per cent (35.1 million votes). He received strong support from the population with the lowest income and education: 49 per cent of voters with a family income of up to one monthly minimum salary, 55 per cent of voters with a low level of education and 49 per cent of the inhabitants of small towns (up to 20,000 inhabitants) voted for him.¹³

In office Collor de Mello introduced a series of 'neo-liberal' economic reforms. But whereas Menem (1989-1999) and Fujimori (1990-2000) each governed for ten years Collor lasted only two and a half years - until his impeachment for corruption in September 1992.

If Collor de Mello was a 'neo-populist of the Right', was (is?) the candidate he defeated in 1989, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, a 'neo-populist of the Left'?

¹³ Scott P. Mainwaring, *Sistemas partidários em novas democracias: O caso do Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro, 2001), p. 44.

Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, the seventh of the eight surviving children of a poverty-stricken rural family from Garanhuns in the interior of Pernambuco in the Northeast, Brazil's poorest region, former metal worker and leader of the metalworkers' union of São Bernardo do Campo in the metropolitan region of São Paulo, with only four years of primary school education, was leader of the PT (*Partido dos Trabalhadores* [Workers' Party]). The PT had been founded in February 1980 by Lula and other 'authentic' union leaders, together with progressive Catholic activists from the *comunidades eclesiais de base*, former urban and rural guerillas, left-wing intellectuals, and members of small (illegal) Trotskyist parties. It was an avowedly socialist party, created during, and totally opposed to, the military dictatorship and, uniquely in Brazilian political history, built *from below*.¹⁴ It elected its first eight federal deputies in 1982, six of them in São Paulo which provided 72 per cent of its national vote, and in 1986, the first Congressional elections after the end of military rule, sixteen including Lula himself. In 1988 it elected the mayors of São Paulo and several other *municípios* in Greater São Paulo and São Paulo state, Porto Alegre and Vitória, Espírito Santo.

In the presidential election of 1989 Lula had the support of organized labour, sections of the urban middle class and the progressive wing of the Catholic Church. He was, however, unable to attract the support of the poorest and least educated voters who in the main, as we have seen, voted for Collor de Mello. In the first round Lula obtained 17.2 per cent of the valid votes (11.6 million votes), only narrowly defeating Leonel Brizola to reach the second round run-off against Collor in which he polled 47 per cent of the vote (31.1

¹⁴ On the formation of the Partido dos Trabalhadores, see Rachel Meneguello, *PT: A formação de um partido, 1979-1982* (São Paulo, 1989) and Margaret E. Keck, *The Workers Party and democratization in Brazil* (New Haven, Conn., 1992).

million).

Lula contested the presidential elections of 1994 and 1998 as the candidate of the PT, in 1998 with the support of the smaller parties of the Left: the PSB, PCdoB and Brizola's PDT. He lost both times to Fernando Henrique Cardoso of the Centre/Centre-Left *Partido da Social Democracia Brasileira* (PSDB), backed by the parties of the Centre-Right/Right. Cardoso, whom no-one has ever accused of being a populist, won a majority among *all* social groups, including the poorest, whether measured by education or income. The PT, with its solid social base in the industrial working class of Sao Paulo, never really bid for the votes of the very poor and underprivileged, heavily concentrated in the North and Northeast.

In the light of Brazil's political history, political culture, and political system (and the defeat of the socialist Left almost everywhere in the world in this period), the growth of the PT since 1985 was a remarkable story. Not only had its candidate for president increased his vote in three successive elections - from 17 percent in 1989 (in the first round) to 27 percent in 1994 and 32 percent in 1998 - but the party had increased its seats in both the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies in every Congressional election. The PT had also won control of the Federal District (in 1994) and Rio Grande do Sul (in 1998) as well as major cities like São Paulo and Porto Alegre. After the October 2000 municipal elections, the PT governed half of the 60 cities with populations over 200,000 and six state capitals, including São Paulo for the second time, Porto Alegre for the fourth time. The PT, however, still seemed a long way from national power.

The presidential election of October 2002, the fourth since the end of the military dictatorship in 1985, was won by Lula and the PT - at the fourth attempt. A number of factors explain why Lula was able to secure the support of voters who traditionally had not voted for

him, both the urban middle class and the poor (most of whom had previously preferred to vote for Collor and Cardoso) - and even some of the rich. In the first place, the PT itself had changed. It had moved to the centre ground. During the 1990s, the so-called *Articulação* (later *Campo Majoritário*) came to have a majority in the party and to adopt more moderate policies. After the expulsion of the *Convergência Socialista* in 1992, the other groups on the Marxist, Trotskyist and Socialist left of the party were increasingly outmanoeuvred and, at least in decision making at the top, somewhat marginalised. Lula's *Carta ao Povo Brasileiro* (June 2002), while emphasizing the need for social policies to reduce poverty and inequality, committed a future PT government to the market economy, macroeconomic stability, the control of inflation and fiscal equilibrium, that is to say, to a continuation of the economic policies of the Cardoso administration.¹⁵ Secondly, political alliances were broadened. For the first time, besides the small parties of the Left, Lula received the support of a small party of the Centre/Right, the Partido Liberal. Thirdly, the party for the first time developed a public relations/media campaign around the personal history and personality of Lula with a strong emotional appeal: 'Lula, paz e amor (Lula, peace and love)'. Even so, it would be difficult to argue that this was overall a 'populist' strategy and campaign.

In 2002 Lula polled 39.4 million votes (46.4 per cent of the valid votes), but could not quite achieve what Cardoso had achieved in 1994 and 1998: outright victory in the first round. In the second round, supported by the PSB and the parties of the Frente Trabalhista (PPS, PDT and PTB), he was comfortably elected with 52.8 million votes (61.3 per cent of the valid vote). The election of a candidate of the Left (although the PT had abandoned the

¹⁵ See, for example, David Samuels, 'From Socialism to Social Democracy: party organisation and the transformation of the Workers' Party in Brazil', *Comparative Political Studies* 37/9 (2004).

label 'socialist' before the elections) represented an important landmark in the consolidation of a mature democracy in Brazil.

In government Lula maintained the 'responsible' economic policies of the previous Cardoso administrations (1995-2002), but was more committed to poverty reduction and a better distribution of income through compensatory social policies. At the same time, while encouraging some early experiments with participatory democracy in states and *municípios* controlled by the PT, most famously in Porto Alegre, Rio Grande do Sul, Lula appeared committed to the further consolidation of Brazil's existing democratic institutions. He remained more a social democrat than a 'neo-populist of the Left'.

After courting disaster in 2005, as a series of corruption scandals rocked his government and severely dented his own popularity, Lula comfortably won re-election in October 2006. In sharp contrast to 2002, however, his social and political base had been dramatically transformed. Research on the 2006 elections clearly shows that he was elected overwhelmingly by the poor, mainly in the North and Northeast.¹⁶ In the less developed 50 per cent of Brazil's 5500 *municípios* (the so-called *grotões*) Lula secured 66 per cent of the vote in the first round (74 per cent in the second round!). In the more developed *municípios* of the South and Southeast, where the middle class, certainly the professional middle class, had turned against him, he actually lost the election (with only 41 per cent of the vote). His success with the poorer sections of society was not, however, the result of a typically polarizing anti-elite, anti-globalisation, anti-American populist discourse. Personal

¹⁶ See Jairo Nicolau and Vitor Peixoto, As bases municipais da votação de Lula em 2006, online http://www.forumnacional.org.br/forum/pforum6_2a.asp (2007); Cesar Zucco, 'The President's "new" constituency: Lula and the pragmatic vote in Brazil's 2006 presidential elections', *Journal of Latin American Studies* ,40 2008, pp. 29-49; Wendy Hunter and Timothy Power, 'Rewarding Lula: executive power, social policy and the Brazilian elections of 2006', *Latin American Politics and Society* , 49/1 2007, pp. 1-30.

identification (Lula as 'one of us') was, of course, an important factor. But it can be largely explained as the political dividend on four years of improved economic growth, higher levels of employment, low inflation, increases in the minimum wage above the rate of inflation and, above all, the significant reduction of poverty and inequality resulting from the comprehensive, but modest and relatively cheap (less than two per cent of government expenditure), cash transfer programme, the Bolsa Família. 4.1 million households were already benefitting from Bolsa Família in June 2004; by July 2006 11.1 million (35 million Brazilians).

The first two years of Lula's second administration (2007-8) were notable for a continuation of previous 'responsible' economic policies and 'progressive' social policies. It remained difficult therefore to describe Lula as a neo-populist of the Left – except perhaps in his foreign policy, especially his policy towards his neighbours in South America, Venezuela in particular.

Why has Brazil been more resistant to neo-populism than many of its neighbours, despite its high levels of poverty and social inequality and the continued existence of second-class and even third-class citizens?

The size and complexity of the country.

Its federal system.

Its level of social and economic development.

Popular resistance to political mobilization historically, a high level of tolerance of social injustice.

Despite the need for electoral and party reform in the interests of greater accountability and a disturbing level of political corruption, a reasonably well-functioning representative democracy with regular, free and fair elections based on universal suffrage, a well-established multi-party system, an independent Congress, an independent judiciary, an independent media, etc.

In the PT, the nearest thing to a well-established social democratic party in Latin America, though the strength of its commitment to democratic practice is questioned by some and it is currently experiencing some serious internal difficulties.

Also the PSDB (and for that matter the PSB and PPS).

Parties of the Centre (PMDB) and Centre-Right (DEM), but no strong parties of the Right clearly representing the 'elite'/'oligarchy'.

A relatively strong and active civil society.

And aspirations to be both a regional and a global power, which generates a certain ambivalence in its relations with the neo-populist led governments in South America, and makes it unusually responsive to international opinion. Among the BRICs, Brazil's democracy is one of the things which differentiates it from China and Russia, though not India.

HOWEVER, with his popularity at an all time high (75-85 per cent approval), especially with the poorest sections of Brazilian society, now his principal political base, and also growing international recognition and widespread admiration, and with Brazil having survived the financial/economic crisis of 2008-9 better than most countries and resumed growth, there has been in the second half of 2009 increasing evidence of Lula's

personalism/populism which had previously been constrained or repressed. In his monthly column in *O Globo* on 1 November 2009 former president Fernando Henrique Cardoso articulated the concerns of many Brazilians when he referred to ‘pequenos desvios de conduto’, ‘pequenos arranhoes na lei’, ‘pequenos assassinatos’ of Brazil’s democratic practices, leading to ‘autoritarismo popular....minando o espirito da democracia constitucional’ and eventually ‘subperonismo (o lulismo)’.

Presidential, Congressional and state governor and assembly elections are due in October 2010. It will be the first presidential election since 1989 in which Lula is not a candidate. Lula resisted the temptation to change the Constitution before the 30 September 2009 deadline to allow himself a possible third mandate. He ignored demands for ‘Mais quatro’ and ‘Queremos’ (cf. Getulio in 1945!). Lula: ‘Eu não brinco com a democracia. Foi muito dificil a conquista-la’ (3 June); ‘A alternância de poder é importante’ (6 June). Here was further evidence that Lula was not a populist. But, like Getulio in 1945, in a number of subtle ways he leaves the possibility on the table.

In the meantime, he is going to extraordinary lengths actively to promote as the PT presidential candidate in 2010, in breach of the electoral rules, his personally chosen successor: Dilma Rousseff. And Dilma is a very problematic candidate. An ex-urban guerrilla during the military dictatorship, she is not a historic *petista* (and has not been chosen in any formal way by the party), though she served in the PT-led state governments of Rio Grande do Sul and as Minister of Mines and Energy in the first Lula administration, and is currently head of the Casa Civil (i.e. Chief of Staff). She was recently diagnosed with lymphatic cancer, but has been pronounced ‘cured’. A technocrat/manager, somewhat lacking in charisma, though currently undergoing a major make-over, she has never before

contested an election. (Lula's choice of Dilma is a good indication of the generally poor quality of PT ministers and PT leadership in Congress and the paucity of PT politicians with experience as state governors.) More than one commentator has compared Lula's choice of Dilma to the famous *dedazo* of Mexican presidents during the period of PRI domination.

Lula is attempting, with full media exposure, to transfer his popularity and the popularity of his government to Dilma, emphasising in particular her links to social spending ('a grande mundanca social') and the PAC (Programa de Aceleração do Crescimento). 6 November 2009 at the National Congress of P Cdo B: 'Dilma e quem vai poder dar continuidade ao nosso projeto'. As a result, Lula's discourse and strategy are becoming increasingly populist. Government expenditure is significantly up (to the level of fiscal irresponsibility?) Bolsa família is to be extended to 13 million households. 'Minha casa, Minha vida' housing policy. Ufanismo. A grandeza do Brasil. And now to pré-sal oil nationalism (again cf. Vargas in 1953!). And the 2016 Olympics! He would like the 2010 election to be a plebiscitary election: for or against him, for or against 'nosso projeto', us v. 'them'. The opposition has been extremely slow to work out how best to deal with this.

What are Lula's intentions after 2010?

To retire to São Bernardo?

To play an international role?

To consolidate his power through Dilma, if she is elected? A Dilma presidency is frequently referred to as 'um terceiro mandato de Lula'. At the end of September at a summit on the island of Margarita Chavez is quoted as saying: 'Minha candidata e Dilma. ...Lula nao se vai. Ele fica, assim como Nestor [Kirchner], que se foi, mas nao se foi'.

To return to power in 2014 - 'nos braços do povo'?

Clearly more work needs to be done expanding, revising and updating the final section of the paper, especially pp. 20-22, before publication. LB.