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The Presence of Labour in the Urban Culture of Santos²

ABSTRACT

During the last quarter of the nineteenth century, a global productive restructuring, widely known as the second industrial revolution, led many countries to seek to better integrate their growing production of food and raw materials in the international market. This demand led to the construction of railroads and ports in various areas of what would later be known as part of the third world. In the case of Brazil, the second half of the nineteenth century witnessed a process of economic and social diversification, during which the country became defined primarily as an exporter of coffee. This process culminated in political reforms, namely the abolition of slavery (1888) and the proclamation of the republic (1889). Immigration and the formation of a labour market, in a moment of intense urbanisation, permitted the creation of a more complex social structure, including the emergence of a working class. This article analyses these processes in a specific city, Santos (São Paulo state), in which the presence of an important labour movement is evident in the urban culture itself.

Keywords: labour movement, urban culture,
coffee trade, immigration, Brazil, Port of Santos

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Social Diversification and Urban Reform

During the last quarter of the nineteenth century, a global productive restructuring, widely known as the second industrial revolution, led many countries to seek to better integrate their growing production of food and raw materials into the international market. This demand led to the construction of railroads and ports in various areas of what would later be known as part of the third world.

In the case of Brazil, the second half of the nineteenth century witnessed a process of economic and social diversification, during which the country became defined primarily as an exporter of coffee. This process culminated in political reforms, namely the abolition of slavery (1888) and the proclamation of the republic (1889). Immigration and the formation of a labour market, in a period of intense urbanisation, permitted the creation of a more complex social structure, including the emergence of a working class. The construction of the ports and railroads were among the first undertakings that united a significant body of free workers.³ The rise of factories enlarged the number of workers, who did not take long to recognise themselves as such through organising their own movement.

Therefore, Santos became the “coffee port”, a privileged place for the study of these larger transformations that Brazilian society was undergoing. With its definition as the point from which expanding coffee production was exported, as well as the point of arrival for massive immigration, the city experienced an accelerated process of urbanisation that led to a tripling of its population during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Moreover, following the building of the railway connection with the plateau and construction of the modernised port, its population tripled again at the turn of the century, doubling once more by the First World War.

The little port of calm waters had been an insignificant place up until the nineteenth century. As late as 1823, Santos was a village of 4,700 inhabitants, of whom 2,000 were slaves and 2,700 were free; among the latter, 1,400 were of mixed races, in various combinations. In 1839, when it was elevated to the category of a city, Santos was still “a perfect poverty-stricken colonial settlement, where the muddy beaches of the port, frequented by bands of vultures, gave the place its local flavour”.⁴

During the 1850s, coffee cultivation spread over the so-called North of São Paulo state and began to dominate the movement of the port. It was a significant moment, since in 1859 a project for a railroad over the costal escarpment from Santos to Jundiaí began; it was completed in 1867. The rail line became the obligatory path for the outflow of almost

3 We do not ignore the debate about the role of slaves in the formation of the Brazilian working class, but this will not be the focus of our article.

4 Guilherme Álvaro: *A Campanha Sanitária de Santos. Suas causas e seus efeitos*, São Paulo 1919, p. II.

all coffee from the state, under the control of the São Paulo Railway Co., the powerful “*Inglesa*”, whose almost century-long monopoly was broken only by the Sorocabana Railway Co. in 1937. All the other railroads of the state funnelled coffee to the single port of Santos.

As a result, and in contrast to the former situation, in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the city began to stir – and not only because of its economic activities. The port, now active, came to be an important abolitionist and republican centre. The city of Santos was actively engaged in movements for political reforms that brought to light, during that period, a much more complex society. Nonetheless, it is interesting to observe that these socio-economic and political changes were only elaborated on the cultural level in a subsequent period. Indeed, Santos at the beginning of the twentieth century witnessed a visible process of institution building, both from the top downward and from the bottom up. These were the institutions that allowed the society to reorganise and reproduce itself, updating culturally the broad transformations it was going through in order to face the twentieth century.

A mandatory point of reference for any cultural analysis of Santos during this period is immigration, significantly altering the city’s urban profile, which became considerably more diverse and cosmopolitan.⁵ The various immigrant groups created a series of clubs and voluntary associations, some religious but others not, in order to fulfil the needs of their members. As one would expect, these were multi-class institutions, though within them class tensions appeared, mixed with ethnic and cultural struggles.⁶ The immigrants also brought their customs and leisure activities.⁷ Alongside popular entertainment, the Guarani Theatre, designed and constructed in the 1880s by the engineer Garcia Redondo and decorated by the painter Benedito Calixto, aimed to provide for the demands of a more sophisticated public, which demonstrated that the immigrants were not the only ones creating institutions in this constantly transformed city. In addition, other affinities, beyond those of nationality, served to gather people together. The theatre was home to drama companies and concerts, including, of course, operas. However, the theatre also

5 According to the 1913 Census, in 41 years the city’s population increased tenfold, reaching 88,967 inhabitants. Immigrants represented 42.5 per cent of the city’s population. From every one hundred inhabitants, twenty-five were Portuguese, nine were Spaniards, three were Italian and one was Turk or Japanese. Maria Lucia Caira Gitahy: *Ventos do Mar. Trabalhadores do Porto, Movimento Operário e Cultura urbana em Santos, 1889–1914*, São Paulo 1992, p. 41.

6 A record of these tensions, in the case of the *Benef. Portuguesa de Santos*, can be found in Gitahy: *Ventos do mar*, pp. 42–43.

7 Even a Square of Bulls (*Redondel de Touros*) was opened in Santos, in 1907, and bullfights took place. Iberian passion seemed to have cooled down in the tropical environment, because the public soon became sick of the bloody spectacle, and in order to maintain the square open, the owner had to present circuses and gymnasts. By 1908 these activities were also replaced by the outdoor movie projector. Gitahy: *Ventos do mar*, p. 44.

opened its doors for abolitionist and republican rallies, as well as festivities and meetings organised by class associations.⁸

Moreover, as part of the socio-economic diversification process, members of the elite created other institutions in the city. The Commercial Association, for example, joined together local businessmen, who also formed various clubs in which they spent their leisure time, as well as cultural and charitable organisations. Feminine associations also appeared, like the one presided over by Eunice Caldas.⁹ Another cultural institution that thrived in Santos at the end of the nineteenth century was the press. Even though various newspapers had circulated in the city earlier, it seems that only in the last quarter of the nineteenth century did minimum conditions exist for the survival of daily newspapers outside the state capital. A diverse and multiform press came to flourish, reaching different social sectors.

At the same time, sanitary reforms, the extension of urban settlement towards the Atlantic, canal building and the creation of new neighbourhoods altered the physical space of the city, expressing, in short, a more diverse social structure. A multicultural and multi-ethnic community, based on affinities of work and residence, as well as on the multiple constraints of the working-class condition developed in the city, offering fertile historical soil for a strong labour movement to thrive. During the last decade of the nineteenth century, mutual aid societies, a pioneer socialist centre and a stillborn socialist working-class party alternated with the first strikes. However, it was only in the early twentieth century that workers started building more durable institutions.

The organisation of the labour movement itself seems to have been a part of this process of institution building. We do not want to claim that the militant workers at the beginning of the twentieth century, among whom anarchist and revolutionary syndicalist political language predominated, proposed any kind of institutionalisation of their movement which would imply concessions to the society they comprehensively criticised and wished to transform. On the contrary, we want to emphasise that the mobilisation and the social struggle itself required the creation of means for their reproduction and for that of the social criticism they transmitted. Hence, the working-class societies formed at the beginning of the twentieth century had as their points of historical reference both the struggles that took place within the labour process, inside the firms, as well as the formation of working-class neighbourhoods and communities, which were irreplaceable spaces for the building and transmission of the traditions of local struggle.

Thus, during the first years of the twentieth century, urban reform coincided with the equally labourious task of reconstructing social and cultural institutions within the city

8 Ibid.

9 Headmistress of one of the new public schools inaugurated by the republican regime, she was also the sister of the doctor and scientist Vital Brasil. The association aimed to educate young ladies and provide assistance to the poor and ill.

in order to face the challenges of the social restructuring then in progress.¹⁰ The elites and the so-called middle classes, still small but already growing, played an important role in this task. By now the expectations of the working class and their response to the profound transformations of labour and the space of the city took the form of a generalised criticism of a highly exclusionary society, whose political system permitted no possibility for popular expression.

For the purpose of this article, it is important to note that the making of the local working class, as was the case with other social groups associated with the emergence of a much more complex urban structure, occurred in the midst of a profound transformation of the space of the city. Throughout Brazil in this period, indispensable urban reforms were underway, brought on by the restructuring of the world economy then in progress. To reformulate the relationship between the city and the countryside, as well as the productive spaces of each, in addition to the redefinition of the country's place in the international division of labour, was not just a task of physical construction. This reformulation also involved the construction of social institutions dedicated to cultural inquiry and to the redefinition of social relations. The creation of the first engineering schools in Brazil was part of this process.¹¹ As a result, higher education in engineering, architecture and urbanism got underway, along with research related to building materials which, as we shall see, came to affect even the labour movement in Santos.

The efforts at social diversification were broad: to create higher cadres, intermediary officers, as well as a vast army of labour, that together would be able to shape a Brazilian concept of the "modern city". The definition of skill requirements for workers was a

10 There are several works on the Santista urban reform. Among them, Luiz Augusto Maia Costa: *O Ideário Urbano Paulista na Virada do Século. O Engenheiro Theodoro Sampaio e as Questões Territoriais e Urbanas Modernas (1886–1903)*, São Carlos 2003; Luiz Augusto Maia Costa: *O Moderno Planejamento Territorial e Urbano em São Paulo. A Presença Norte-Americana do Debate da Formação do Pensamento Urbanístico Paulista, 1886–1919*, São Paulo 2005 (PhD dissertation); Sidney Piocchi Bernardini: *Os Planos da Cidade. As Políticas de Intervenção Urbana em Santos de Estevan Furtos a Saturnino de Brito*, São Carlos 2006; Sidney Piocchi Bernardini: *Construindo Infra-estruturas, Planejando Territórios. A Secretaria de Agricultura, Comércio e Obras Públicas do Governo Estadual Paulista*, São Paulo 2007 (PhD dissertation).

11 The *Escola Politécnica do Rio de Janeiro*, originated from successive re-organisations of the *Academia Real Militar*, was created in 1874; Luiz Antonio Cunha: *A Universidade Temporária, Rio de Janeiro 1980*; the *Escola de Minas de Ouro Preto* was founded in 1875; José Murilo de Carvalho: *A Escola de Minas de Ouro Preto. O Peso da Glória*, São Paulo 1978; the *Escola Politécnica de São Paulo* in 1894; Sylvia Fischer: *Ensino e Profissão. O Curso de Engenheiros-Arquitetos da Escola Politécnica de São Paulo*, São Paulo 1989 (PhD dissertation); *Mackenzie College*, in 1896; Maria Cecília Loschiavo Santos: *Escola Politécnica (1884–1984)*, São Paulo 1985.

recurring preoccupation of the elite during those years, and took a concrete form not only in the courses offered by the engineering schools, but also in the *Liceus de Artes e Ofícios*,¹² and in other trade schools to train the mid-level cadres of the vast army of labourers.¹³ By the second half of the nineteenth century, a formal real estate market had appeared. At the end of the century, with the immense building boom, a construction industry emerged, organised on a business-like basis. The establishment of this industry was slow and complex, since each of its sectors developed at their own pace. At the same time, rental markets as well as markets for land and houses gradually emerged.¹⁴

These broader processes, mentioned here briefly, had particular characteristics in different Brazilian cities. Maria Irene Szmrecsányi points out that in Rio de Janeiro “state funds and policies were used to promote services and urban public works”, while in São Paulo the option adopted was the promotion of coffee, including a far more diversified complex of activities, which implied a polarisation of its vast hinterland by the metropolis in formation. Consequently, the businessmen from the city of São Paulo found “excellent investment opportunities within the city itself”.¹⁵ Various other cities were equally transformed. It is enough to remember that the Engineer Saturnino de Brito elaborated general urban plans for around 40 Brazilian cities in the period, among them the city

12 The *Liceu de Artes e Ofícios de São Paulo* was founded in 1873 and gained a new building in 1900. Concerning the role this trade school played in a city in intense urbanisation, see: Maria Lucia Caira Gitahy: *Qualificação e Urbanização em São Paulo. A Experiência do Liceu de Artes e Ofícios, 1873–1934*, in: Maria Alice Rosa Ribeiro (ed.), *Trabalhadores Urbanos e Ensino Profissional*, Campinas 1986, p. 21–88.

13 Maria Lucia Caira Gitahy (ed.): *Desenhando a Cidade do Século XX*, São Carlos 2005.

14 Paulo Cesar Xavier Pereira: *Espaço, Técnica e Construção*, São Paulo 1988.

15 Maria Irene Szmrecsányi: *Rio e São Paulo*, in: *Revista USP* 17 (1993), pp. 202–219.

of Santos.¹⁶ The city had been the object of urban planning since 1892,¹⁷ though only at the beginning of the twentieth century did economic and political conditions permit more effective urban interventions. In 1905, Saturnino de Brito took charge of the Sanitation Commission, an agency of the state government, and detailed a plan for the city that included, to be sure, the network of drainage canals, as proposed by Fuertes. This network opened broader horizons for urban expansion. Santos's canals reorganised the urban landscape, creating new public spaces that altered even the traditional patterns of sociability. It was on Brito's avenues, as Carlos Roberto Monteiro de Andrade points out, more than in parks or squares, that new forms of social exchange took place.¹⁸

Santos expanded eastward towards the Atlantic, thanks to the network of canals, the opening of new avenues and to the line of tramcars (pulled by mules). The old farms were divided up, and both the increasing commerce in the old city centre, close to the port, and the sanitation measures pushed the residents from the centre eastward, where new neighbourhoods formed. These new districts were: Macuco (which began to be occupied

16 About Saturnino de Brito's urbanism, see: Carlos Roberto Monteiro de Andrade: *A Cidade como um Corpo São e Belo*, in: *Cidade e História, Anais do Seminário de História da Cidade e do Urbanismo*, Salvador 1993, pp. 77–81. Saturnino also participated in the sanitation work in Campinas, Belém, Paraíba and Aracaju. Between 1920 and 1929, he opened an Engineering Firm in Rio de Janeiro, where he developed many of his projects. Milton Vargas: *Obras de Saneamento (Abastecimento de Água, Esgotos e Recuperação de Terras)*, in: Shozo Motoyama (ed.), *Tecnologia e Industrialização no Brasil. Uma perspectiva histórica*, São Paulo 1994, ch. 4, p. 93. Other references to the engineer can be found, for instance, in Candido Malta Campos Neto: *Os Rumos da Cidade. Urbanismo e Modernização em São Paulo*, São Paulo 1999 (PhD dissertation); and Cristina de Campos: *Ferrovias e Saneamento em São Paulo. O Engenheiro Antonio Francisco de Paula Souza e a Construção da Rede de Infra-Estrutura Territorial e Urbana Paulista, 1870–1893*, São Paulo 2007 (PhD dissertation), besides the already mentioned works of Costa and Bernardini. Concerning the urban and sanitation reforms promoted by the São Paulo state's government during the period, see Sidney Piocchi Bernardini, 2006 and 2007.

17 A sanitation plan was already proposed by Estevan Antonio Fuertes, a Cornell engineering professor, hired by the state government in 1892. Fuertes' reports included recommendations to be implemented immediately in order to avoid the situation getting worse, and a complete sanitary plan that was transformed into a document widely discussed in the Brazilian professional community of the time. From these proposals and discussions, Saturnino de Brito projected a network of open-air canals that would drain Santos' humid soil, thus solving at the same time the problems of sewage and of constant rain. When it was presented, in 1898, the plan was considered utopian, but the economic prosperity brought by coffee, along with the political changes at the federal level and, especially in the state government, altered this picture.

18 Carlos Roberto Monteiro de Andrade: *O Plano de Saturnino de Brito para Santos e a Construção da Cidade Moderna*, in: *Revista Espaço e Debates* 34 (1991), pp. 55–63.

as early as in the 1870s); Vila Mathias (1886); Gonzaga, already at the edge of the Atlantic (1886); all the area of the beaches from José Menino to the Ponta da Praia (from 1900 and on) and Vila Belmiro (from 1910 to 1915). This expansion followed a discontinuous pattern, and between the neighbourhoods there were enormous unoccupied spaces that were used as pastures for various animals, still used in the transportation of coffee until the end of the 1930s.

Nonetheless, the urban reforms were undertaken not only to provide better sanitary conditions for the inhabitants or to offer a modern image of the city to the world, since an obvious process of class segregation in spatial terms also took place. A characteristic of the urban reforms of the time was a policy of eliminating the slum tenements and other populous constructions that failed to meet the standards of such reforms. The homeless ended up being thrown on the streets, and the promised housing was never built, neither by the municipal nor the state government.¹⁹ Trying to manage as best they could, the homeless were pushed to the hillsides and less valuable neighbourhoods, segregated from the modern city under construction.

In cities like Santos, public space was reconstructed, settlement patterns disciplined, different areas were assigned distinct functions, and working class neighbourhoods were separated from more refined ones and from those of the middle class. According to Mazeviero, two distinct vectors characterised the urban growth of that period:

[...] on one side was the exclusion vector, to which belonged workers, immigrants, former slaves who started to occupy the central region of the city, the hillsides and the suburbs closest to the urban perimeter. The exclusion vector comprises the north and northeast sectors of Santos, and part of the centre, which becomes almost exclusively commercial. On the other side, the vector of financial upgrade of the land followed real state investments along the Avenue Conselheiro Nébias, in the direction of the Barra beach, where the first elite mansions arose, as well as the hotels and luxury clubs that transformed the coastal sector into a leisure core in the new 'modernised' city. This vector comprised the south side of Santos. Thus, the urban expansion of Santos was marked by the division of the city into two social cores as urban reforms pushed the poor population to the periphery of the city, it also created conditions for the occupation and financial upgrade of the shore areas. These changes in the city were commanded by the state and sponsored by the capital generated by the coffee economy [...].²⁰

19 Luiz Antonio de Paula Nunes: *Saber Técnico e Legislação. A Formação do Urbanismo em Santos – 1894 a 1951*, São Paulo 2001 (master's thesis); Wilson Gambeta: *Desacumular a Pobreza: Santos, limiar do século*, in: *Espaço e Debates* 11 (1984), pp. 17–27.

20 Maria Carolina Mazeviero: *Memória e Identidade Urbana em Santos. Usos e Preservação de Tipologias Arquitetônicas da Avenida Conselheiro Nébias*. São Paulo 2008 (master's thesis),

It was this changing environment from which the labour movement emerged and where it found its voice, leaving its mark on the urban culture of Santos. Thus, it is not surprising that construction workers played a crucial role not only in the cities but also in the labour movement, which was an essential element of the formation of the working class.

The Santista Working Class: the Port and Building Workers' Central Role²¹

As we have already mentioned, the construction and transportation sectors were responsible for the first large concentrations of workers in Brazil. In Santos, the growing importance of the port in linking the city to the rest of the country and to the world, along with very rapid population growth and urbanisation, led to a fever of public and private construction that increasingly demanded a numerous and skilled labour force. In effect, the so-called artisans of the construction sector played a remarkable role in the formation of the working class in Santos.

The building industry's artisans

During the first two decades of the twentieth century, construction workers were the most combative group in the city and showed more associational potential for sustaining the continuity of certain struggles, class entities and demands. It is important here to analyse the place occupied by this group in an eminently port city and in the dynamic of Santos's working class. The first factor to be considered is the skill of the craftsmen. Stone masons and carpenters occupied strategic positions in the "art of building": they had basic knowledge of geometry and mathematical calculations; they were experts in using T-squares, plumb lines and levels; and they were able to read the blueprints or other plans used for construction projects.²² Painters, plasterers, and marble cutters nurtured artistic inclinations and sought to master skills in modelling and decorating.

Another factor in the bargaining power of the craftsmen was the peculiar market structure of the construction industry. In the housing sector, work was done to order and depended on a considerable number of small contractors and builders who were generally vulnerable to strikes. Since these contractors took on jobs with fixed deadlines and received payment only after the project was finished, any delay in the completion of the work implied serious losses because they needed to deal with the debts they had pre-

pp. 46–47.

21 This section is based mainly on Gitahy: Ventos do Mar; Fernando Teixeira da Silva: Operários sem Patrões. Os Trabalhadores da Cidade de Santos no Entreguerras, Campinas 2003.

22 João Freire: Anarquistas e Operários. Ideologia, Ofício e Práticas Sociais. Anarquismo e o Operariado em Portugal, 1900–1940, Porto 1992, pp. 87–89.

viously assumed. If the labour market favoured the craftsmen, contractors and builders were prepared to resolve disputes rapidly with their workers.²³ Consequently, small firms tended to accept the conditions established by the unions in order to avoid or quickly settle the usually partial strikes in the sector, “which caused rivalries among the bosses [...]. They [the contractors] could not endure, for very long, seeing their building sites at a standstill and others moving along”, a worker wrote in his memoirs in his memoirs.²⁴ Thus, craftsmen had a reasonable margin of manoeuvre to restrict production, regulate the labour supply, protect certain crafts, specify the number of workers to carry out a certain task, indicate the number of apprentices and assistants to hire, limit lay-offs and permit the presence of union delegates who inspected working conditions and tried to make sure that only unionised workers were hired.

On the organisational level, the craftsmen of Santos, unlike those in other cities of the period, formed unions by economic category and included labourers who performed unskilled tasks. They assumed that if all crafts were united in a single entity strikes could be more successful, wages higher and codes of conduct at work could be reinforced, thus eliminating the isolated organisation of craftsmen jealous of their prerogatives and distinctive characteristics. Moreover, the craftsmen in the construction industry strove to support and organise the labour movement in Santos, making it a bastion of revolutionary syndicalism, based on federative organisations, like the *Federação Operária Local de Santos* (FOLS, Santos Local Labour Federation), founded in 1907.

Nevertheless, this central role of craftsmen in the dynamics of labour organisation in Santos started to decline with the First World War, when the group faced a long conjuncture of unemployment, low wages, the end of the closed shop and the loss of various other achievements. The war favoured certain building contractors, who tried out new measures to deal with the labour problem. Especially the pioneering management policy of Roberto Simonsen, director of the *Companhia Construtora de Santos* (Santos Construction Company), which was established in 1912, is worth mentioning in this regard. Even with the crisis brought on by the war, the company underwent a marked expansion, attaining a position of leadership in the sector in adopting concerted management initiatives to confront the active construction workers’ trade unions.

By the mid-1930s, the craftsmen faced a series of different issues that weakened their traditional position in the Santos labour movement. First, the *Companhia Construtora* gained support of the municipal government, which favoured the company in the dis-

23 Sheldon Leslie Maram: *Anarquistas, Imigrantes e o Movimento Operário Brasileiro, 1890–1920*, Rio de Janeiro 1979, pp. 51–52.

24 *Memórias de Severino Gonçalves Antunha*. Santos 1968, in: Edgar Rodrigues: *Nacionalismo e Cultura Social, 1913–1922*, Rio de Janeiro s. d., p. 361.

tribution of contracts for public works,²⁵ thus becoming one of the largest construction companies in the country by the 1920s. Second, the *Centro dos Construtores e Industriais de Santos* (CCIS, Centre of Building Contractors and Industrialists of Santos), founded in 1917, undermined union control over the labour market, creating a registration system without which the workers could not have access to the building site. Third, the *Companhia Construtora* and the CCIS established a policy inspired by the North American private welfare system, offering social benefits such as pension funds and assistance to their workers. This became a traditional anti-union policy, contrary to state intervention in labour relations.

Finally, the struggle for regulation of the professions of engineering and architecture gradually introduced a division of labour based on greater separation between conception and execution, as well as greater forward planning and precision in construction activities.²⁶ Both professions began to occupy a privileged position in the market and the labour process. They also started to address the “absolute predominance of the builders”, as Simonsen himself noted.²⁷ The hierarchy within large firms, like the *Companhia Construtora de Santos*, began to change through the introduction of teams which paired scientifically trained engineers with skilled site foremen who could transmit more carefully designed plans to other workers.

The impact of these changes on the organisation and mobilisation of the craftsmen was by no means insignificant. By the mid-1930s, the first two decades of the century seemed very distant, when well-shod building workers, proud of their abilities, attended drawing classes at the union, wrote in the ephemeral workers’ newspapers, read classic works of sociology at the FOLS, where, wearing ties, they also taught what they knew to young bricklayers’ helpers.²⁸ Also long gone were the days when short strikes, or the threat of their spread, secured complete success for their demands.

The appearance of large firms and the growing role of engineers and architects in construction activities proved determinant in redefining the relationship between craftsmen and their employers. Many workers started to sell their labour power to a large firm, the *Companhia Construtora*. In this company, engineers gained a greater role in technical and economic decisions, articulating technical knowledge and economic power in the production process. Even the craftsmen in the housing sector, who stayed in direct contact with small contractors, suffered from the effects of the policies of the larger companies.

25 Coraly Gará Caetano: *Desvendando Mistérios. Roberto Simonsen e a Luta de Classes*, Campinas 1994 (PhD dissertation).

26 Sylvia Fischer: *Os arquitetos da Poli: Ensino e Profissão em São Paulo*, São Paulo 2005.

27 Roberto Simonsen: *À Margem da Profissão. Discursos, Conferências, Publicações*, São Paulo 1932, p. 157.

28 *Memórias de Severino*, p. 127.

These firms sought to subordinate the small contractors to their intransigent anti-union policy and defeated various strikes between the two world wars.

Finally, it is important to highlight that it was in this context of struggle against the “empiricism” of the contractors (*mestres de obras*) that Roberto Simonsen, in a pioneered a real campaign on behalf of scientific management among Brazilian businessmen. As he admitted, this was a way of dealing with the “conflicts that are inherent to the relationship between workers and employers”.²⁹

*The port workers*³⁰

The characteristic of most ports at this period was the physical and institutional dispersion of its units, without the existence of a central organisation, which made the creation of a permanent body of workers difficult. Thus, port work was structured, as a general practice, in the presence of intermediates (wharfingers, navigation companies, export houses and so on) who hired a casual labour force. However, in Santos the dispute over the hiring of workforce acquired a peculiar profile, because the port was organised in an atypical way. The *Companhia Docas de Santos* (Santos Docks Company), supported by the federal government, soon monopolised all the loading and unloading operations that took place on land. After the strike for the eight-hour day in 1908, only the stevedores – who operated inside the ships – were not entirely absorbed by the *Companhia*.

Therefore, unlike in the cases of fragmented port complexes, this company did not organise its labour force through the casual labour system: it maintained a permanent body of workers, whom it was able to discipline in a more effective way. In fact, out of the six port strikes between 1889 and 1912, only the one in 1889 brought positive results for the workers. In the other stoppages, the company’s policy was always intransigent: hiring hoards of strike-breakers and mobilising a vast police contingent.

Nevertheless, the company’s control was limited by the nature of port work itself. Loading and unloading operations were performed by gangs (*ternos*) of workers in an industry in which machinery and the technical division of labour did not play a very significant role. The involvement of the port workers in the gangs, the considerable size of the port and the existence of anonymity implied familiarity and the formation of informal networks, upon which the workers’ survival and their ability to learn secret ways of resistance depended.

29 John D. French: *O ABC dos Operários. Conflitos e Alianças de Classe em São Paulo, 1900–1950*, São Paulo 1995, p. 69; see also Barbara Weinstein: *(Re)formação da Classe Trabalhadora no Brasil (1920–1964)*, São Paulo 2000.

30 The description that follows is based, mainly, on Gitahy: *Ventos do Mar*; Silva: *Operários sem Patrões*; Fernando Teixeira da Silva: *A Carga e a Culpa. Os Operários das Docas de Santos. Direitos e Cultura de Solidariedade, 1937–1868*, São Paulo 1995.

Social relationships also preceded those established in the workplace. Personal and family ties came into play from the moment of hiring, creating multiple loyalties and labour traditions transmitted from generation to generation. Thus, many families were socialised in the port, which created true generations of militancy and union experience. In short, these ties of solidarity created a propitious field for collective action, such as the almost instantaneous interruption of work in the whole port, sometimes without any previous organisation or officially formulated demands.

The stevedores long fought fiercely and successfully to escape the enormous monopolistic shadow of the *Companhia Docas de Santos*. The craft culture of the stevedores, their habits and beliefs, were intimately related to the casual nature of port work,³¹ whose negatives aspects, like wage instability, could be converted into advantages. Many stevedores were not seduced by the prospect of permanent and regular employment. Since they worked for different companies, they did not identify their occupation with any particular firm. Furthermore, they identified themselves mainly their craft, which was a source of pride and gave them a strong feeling of independence.

The stevedores began a long struggle for control over the labour market, achieving a closed shop in 1930. Another important step was to establish control over the labour process, which would allow the union to oversee the way in which tasks should be performed. This situation put the stevedores outside the conventional parameters of industrial discipline. The work norms that came to prevail codified power relations in a form similar to the efforts of skilled factory workers to intervene in the organisation of work. And, in fact, the stevedores imposed and negotiated long-lasting labour rules to organise hiring and the performance of tasks in the ships, thus decreasing management influence.

Indeed, the longevity of the stevedores' wide-ranging power is surprising. Along with the closed shop clause, the union organised work in turns so as to distribute employment opportunities equitably among all the unionised stevedores, a measure which had become effective during the Second World War. Hence, the daily hiring of workers mitigated the favouritism that privileged a minority in detriment to the majority. Another decisive step was taken in 1956, when the Senate passed a law establishing the rotation of foremen.

Consequently, the representatives of the ship owners lost their prerogative of choosing their own agents, because the stevedores themselves then started to exert the function of foremen alternately, and none of them was able to perform this function for longer than sixty days. Therefore, everyone had the opportunity of gaining a higher wage. At the same time the stevedores' pride of not having bosses was boosted, since they could be workers, union delegates, and foremen in their own craft. Hence, they were able to decide which stevedores should work on a given day and determine the work conditions;

31 Gordon Phillips/Noel Whiteside: *Casual Labour. The Unemployment Question in the Port Transport Industry (1880–1970)*, Oxford 1985, p. 271.

these were the main issues during the complex struggles in the ports.³² In general, as we will see later, we can affirm that the craftsmen of the construction industry were to revolutionary syndicalism in the First Republic what the stevedores were to communism between the end of the Second World War and the 1964 military coup. Each, in their own ways, constituted the main militant group of the working class in Santos during the first half of the twentieth century.

Labour Market, Labour Process and Labour Movement

Santos was the arena of some of the first strikes in Brazil, as in 1877, when the coffee loaders stopped work in order to demand an increase in their wages. During the 1890s, the city registered the second highest occurrence of strikes in the country (ten), after Rio de Janeiro. Besides, the 1891 Santos shutdown was the first citywide general strike in Brazil. In the midst of all these movements, the city's workers built a remarkable associative culture. In the 1880s, for instance, there were 15 mutual aid societies in Santos, and 40 others between 1891 and 1920.³³ There were additional mentions of benefit societies, clubs, drama and dance groups, as well as numerous labour newspapers. Moved by the broadening prospects of citizenship for workers brought on by the proclamation of the republic, some socialists sought to join together political parliamentary struggles with those of the trade unions to defend workers' interest. They tried to articulate parliamentary actions and trade unions in order to better defend the workers' demands. As early as 1889, Santos was the cradle of the first Brazilian socialist circle, whose objective was the founding of cooperatives and of a socialist party, along with publishing the newspaper, *A Questão Social* (The Social Question).

In 1890, the building craftsmen founded the *União Operária* (Workers' Union), a society with a mutual aid character, which fused with the Centro Socialista (Socialist Centre) in 1896. In April 1904, it was the construction workers, once again, who created the *Sociedade Primeiro de Maio* (May Day Society). Months later other groups of workers organised the *Sociedade Internacional União dos Operários* (International Union of the Workers Society), with the explicit goal of uniting all the workers of the city, rather than just a specific occupational group or industrial category. Both institutions nurtured divergences, but also acted together in some movements, like in the port strike of 1905.

In 1906 and 1907, in the midst of various strikes, with an emphasis on the struggle for the eight-hour day in 1907, direct actions of workers demonstrated that revolutionary syndicalism was present in the city. In July 1907, representatives of building

32 Howard Kimeldorf: *Reds or Rackets? The Making of Radical and Conservative Unions on the Waterfront*, California 1988.

33 Tânia de Luca: *O Sonho do futuro Assegurado. O Mutualismo em São Paulo*, São Paulo 1990, p. 20.

craftsmen and other groups under the leadership of activists of the *Sociedade Primeiro de Maio* founded the *Federação Operária Local de Santos* (FOLS); later on, the Internacional also joined direct action. In 1912, with unemployment spreading in the port, the labour movement turned to the construction workers, organised in the FOLS with stone cutters, tailors, textile workers, metal workers, machinists, carters, sackers and coffee loaders, stevedores and dockers. In that year, the Santos' workers formed the main support of the *Confederação Operária Brasileira* (COB, Brazilian Workers' Confederation), the first national union confederation, which had 22,500 associates from Santos, grouped in the FOLS, 5,000 from Rio de Janeiro and 10,000 from São Paulo.³⁴ The marked presence of followers of revolutionary syndicalism within the Santos labour movement led to the city being known as the "Brazilian Barcelona". Between 1912 and 1914, the FOLS carried out a notable campaign against the high cost of living, but a strong police reaction hit the movement, leading to the expulsion of several immigrant activists, largely Portuguese.

However, up until the First World War, port strikes, which had more visibility and public impact, were the scenes of the most dramatic and intense struggles. In an economy tied primarily to coffee exports, the transportation industry, especially ports and railways, had become a highly strategic sector. If coffee was not to reach international consumers, the whole economy could collapse. Thus, bosses and government were willing to do practically anything, from repression to negotiation, in order to avoid serious interruptions. The situation of the port workers was ambiguous. The strategic position of their craft increased their bargaining power, but, at the same time, they had to deal with various opposing interests, almost always inflexible, like the huge *Companhia Docas de Santos*, the ship owners, the exporters, and the state itself. Besides in a port of differing bosses and occupational groups, the workers faced a large diversity of tasks, schedules, wages and labour conditions.

In 1889, the longshoremen went on strike against the Commercial Association, composed of their bosses (coffee export houses), since the *Companhia Docas de Santos* still employed only the port construction workers. Through the mediation of the police commissioner and consuls, the strike was short (six days) and successful. The reasons for this victory included the presence of a yellow fever epidemic in the city, which affected negatively the supply of workers, as well as the port construction which was underway and part of the coffee harvest waiting to be loaded. But the port workers would not have the same luck in subsequent shutdowns. In May 1891, 4,000 of the city's workers walked out. The reaction did not take long. Strike breakers, the state militia, and ships from the navy were all mobilised. The excess labour supply in the market also began to affect the organisation of workers adversely, particularly those of the port.

34 Maram: Anarquistas, p. 56.

The strong abolitionist movement in Santos was responsible for a large influx of former slaves into the city, many of who formed the *Jabaquara Quilombo*.³⁵ At this time, they were used as strike breakers in the port. In this first big shutdown of the period, the ideological use of abolitionism was fundamental in promoting what the port workers' newspapers had warned about emphatically as the "racial division of workers". The coffee exporters succeeded in presenting the conflict between strikers and strike breakers as the result of "racial prejudice" of immigrant workers against a population with a recent experience in the abolitionist struggle, when in fact what was really in question was the chronic problem of the reserve army of labour.

The argument served as a justification for the isolation, defeat, and repression of the strikers, which would be repetitively used in the following port strikes. These movements were repeatedly exploited by the *Companhia Docas* against its rivals in the dispute over the control of loading and unloading operations. For example, in the violent general strike of 1897, the company succeeded in its struggle against warehouse owners and took over customs operations on the wharves. In 1908, arguing again that their services were of "public interest", the company took charge of all coffee transportation in the port, eliminating carters and coffee loaders from this space.

On the other hand, the power and recurrent intransigence of the company, along with the regular repression of the workers, contributed to strengthening links of solidarity inside and outside the port, attracting popular sympathy for strike movements, and creating institutions capable of organising different occupational groups, such as the *Sociedade Internacional União dos Operários* and the *Federação Operária Local de Santos* (FOLS). These organisations led strikes that spread beyond the limits of the city, such as the one initiated in 1905 by the stevedores and the 1908 strike for the eight-hour day, which won the solidarity of workers from São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro.

In this initial period of working-class formation in Santos, which lasted from the late nineteenth century to the eve of the First World War, many groups of workers joined together to build a movement and a class, whose core were the port workers. This happened even though the experiences of these workers with the market and labour process differed widely, as did their cultural and social origins. Some had come from rural lives in country villages in Portugal or the Atlantic islands, while others had endured slavery in Brazil, and still others had experienced tortuous life histories in Europe or Asia.

In general, the Santos labour movement of the period was more important simply for its existence than for any of its concrete achievements. The movement proved unable to transform the rights and material gains it won into legislative victories and had to engage in repeated struggles in order to make the gains effective and to maintain them. These constant efforts, of which we can only present the bare outlines, frequently slipped into bitter strikes and created the aura of a combative and heroic labour movement in Santos.

35 A quilombo is a settlement of freeborn and runaway African slaves.

The Santos labour movement re-emerged with force during 1919 and 1920, in the midst of a strike wave that spread through the main industrial centres of the country. With the recovery of the construction industry, craftsmen in that sector once again became the most organised and mobilised group in the city. They sought to reorganise the local labour movement under the banner of revolutionary syndicalism, a current to which only their union, the *Sociedade União de Artes e Ofícios*, adhered explicitly. Thus the construction workers, along with the port workers, became the target of police repression, management reaction and nationalist xenophobia.

In this conjuncture, revolutionary syndicalism rapidly lost influence over workers in comparison to other currents: Christians, Socialists, Communists (following the creation of the Communist Party of Brazil in 1922) and, above all, reformists, who defended State intervention in labour relations and increased their influence during the 1920s among stevedores, dockers, carters, baggers, and coffee loaders. All these occupational groups linked to the port very quickly became the principal Santos bases for the official corporatist trade unionism implemented by Getúlio Vargas's first government (1930–1945).

In fact, right after the 1930 revolution that ended the First Republic, the stevedores' trade union drew close to sectors of the new government, namely to the so-called *tenentes* (lieutenants), who defended corporatist unionism. And, as we mentioned earlier, they achieved the closed shop, eliminating definitely the competition imposed on the sector by the *Companhia Docas*.

Initially, the communists strongly opposed corporatism, which contributed to the party's temporary isolation from most Santos workers and trade unions. The situation began to change when the Ministry of Labour recognised all the city's unions. In particular, during the strikes of 1934 and 1935, the party developed an effective alliance that allowed it, for the first time, to acquire decisive influence among several occupational groups and their respective trade unions. As a result, the communists increasingly politicised the Santos labour movement through practices and alternative projects that threatened the new born corporatism.

The communists' influence among the stevedores, particularly towards the end of the *Estado Novo* dictatorship (1937–1945), became one of the principal reasons for the outstanding importance of the Communist Party in the city. The party's activists gave numerous demonstrations of their grassroots political presence among the workers. It was up to the communists, largely, "to pacify the stowage", meaning to create the main political, contractual, and institutional mechanisms that made a more equitable distribution of work opportunities and wages among the stevedores possible. Indeed, the resounding electoral success of the PCB among the workers of Santos between the immediate post-war period and the military *coup d'état* in 1964 fostered the characterisation of the city as the "Brazilian Moscow" and the "Red City". Undoubtedly, the stevedores and other communists were those most responsible for the consolidation of a strong culture of solidarity in Santos. The mobility of these workers on and off the docks, which the

casual nature of their work permitted, was the fundamental reason for the strengthening of the links between the port and the city.

It is worth emphasising that the port workers established social relationships at work, in their neighbourhoods and in kinship networks, which served to strengthen their sense of community and belonging to a specific occupational group. On the other hand, the relationship of the port workers with those from other occupations nurtured a strong sense of class cohesion.

The almost complete absence of industries, the unifying force of the port in the labour market and the proximity between workers and unions, occupying common spaces, were, in short, determinant factors for the formation of a vigorous labour movement. This movement was strongly based on a peculiar culture of solidarity that expressed itself publicly in the moments of collective mobilisation when workers occupied the city. However, urban policies aiming at social segregation and the fragmentation of the labour sociability networks targeted the city as well.

Conclusion

This article focused on the presence of the workers of Santos, especially the port workers, in an urban space redesigned in large part to adapt the “port of coffee” to the requirements of the international market. Between the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of twentieth, a vertiginous influx of immigrants and the formation of a multi-ethnic labour market profoundly transformed the face of the city. These changes did not come about without difficulties; in fact, they caused many deaths and flights from an unhealthy city stricken by numerous epidemics. The urban sanitary reforms that took place, including both public works and private measures, resulted, among other things, in a process of social and spatial segregation of workers. The working-class neighbourhoods that then emerged generated social as well as territorial references, because in these spaces workers wove networks of identity and solidarity among neighbours, relatives, and workmates. Casual labour in the port eased the way workers usually circulated among dock, street, and home. During several street rallies, those who lived in these neighbourhoods adhered and helped to build broader and collective solidarities, creating a strong associative culture.

Among other challenges, workers had to face new changes implemented by “scientific management”, including a reorganisation of the labour market and of the construction industry. It was not coincidence that a special group within the construction industry – the artisans – initially became the organisational core of the local labour movement. These were the same workers who later suffered from the divisive impact of “modern” and “scientific” policies of the organisation of work, in a moment of redefinition of the role of engineers and architects in the construction industry.

The port workers, in their turn, brought greater public visibility to their rallies and strikes, as they belonged to an essential sector of the country’s economy and in a port

that was at the heart of the city. Nevertheless, in contrast to workers in the majority of other ports, the *Companhia Docas de Santos's* employees encountered a progressively more centralised organisation of port operations. The dockers and other port workers had to face an intransigent company, which instead of negotiating with its employees, constantly resorted to police violence and to the hiring of thousands of strike-breakers. As part of the outstanding role the employees of the *Companhia Docas* played in the labour movement of Santos, the stevedores became the driving force in organising local workers, especially after the Second World War. In order to do so, they implemented and maintained for decades a closed shop policy that preserved their autonomy from the tentacles of the *Companhia Docas*.

Both revolutionary syndicalism in the earlier years of the Republic and the later labour movement led by the Communist Party between 1945 and 1964, spread beyond the local scene and made their way into the broader social and political history of Brazil, especially during conjunctures of great political crisis. However, analysing these developments would go beyond the scope of this article. That would be another fascinating topic.

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