

IMAGINING AN INDUSTRIAL COMMUNITY: INDUSTRIALISTS AND WORKING-CLASS CULTURE IN POSTWAR BRAZIL

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The dominant narratives of popular politics and working-class culture in Brazil since World War II have emerged from the work of sociologists and political scientists who have focused almost entirely on such issues as populism and corporatism.¹ The effect of this scholarly orientation has been to highlight the initiatives of the state, and to imply that virtually all class struggles in postwar Brazil were mediated or orchestrated by the state apparatus. This has tended to obscure a distinguishing feature of postwar Brazilian society: the ambitious and wide-ranging efforts by the industrial bourgeoisie, through autonomous organizations, to increase productivity, enforce labor discipline, and mold cooperative worker-citizens. This meant not only sponsoring programs, run by industrialist federations, for rational training of workers or courses on human relations in the workplace, but also staging various campaigns to create a shared "industrial culture" that would unite capital and labor around the goals of national development and social peace.

This story of efforts by employer-run organizations to remake the culture of the "working masses" in postwar São Paulo has its roots in the 1920s. It was during that decade that a group of industrialist-engineers elaborated a project for national development through industrialization that stressed rationalization and increased productivity, and reflected the international mania for Taylorism and Fordism.² While this project, as conceptualized by such industrial spokesmen as Roberto Simonsen and Alexandre Siciliano Júnior, placed even skilled workers in a distinctly subordinate position within the industrial hierarchy, in classic Fordist fashion it did envision the formation of disciplined, patriotic worker-citizens who would participate in an imagined industrial community in which the interests of labor and capital overlapped and even blurred.

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The particular strategies being developed by the Simonsen circle in the 1920s had yet to penetrate to any significant extent to the factory floor. Most industrial employers, if they had moved beyond the crudest means of labor discipline, relied either on traditional paternalistic forms of social control or, in the case of larger firms, resorted to some variant of welfare capitalism whereby individual owners or firms, without state coercion, provided expanded benefits to loyal, cooperative (and non-unionized) workers. But by late 1920s key industrialist associations such as CIESP (Centro de Indústrias do Estado de São Paulo) and influential figures within the employer class were tentatively embracing the idea of the state as mediator between capital and labor.³

Under the dictatorship of Getúlio Vargas (1930-1945), leading industrialists and their associations collaborated in the formulation, if not the rigorous implementation, of new labor legislation and corporatist regulations for employer associations and trade unions. During the Estado Novo (1937-1945), when Vargas initiated a program of civic events to symbolize worker identification with the Brazilian nation-state, leading industrialist spokesmen participated. Having crushed, coopted or forced underground the more militant segments of the labor movement, Vargas methodically replaced the confrontational May Day commemorations of the past with carefully choreographed rallies in soccer stadiums. Employer associations urged their members to supply trucks and buses to transport workers to these ceremonies, and prominent industrialists stood by Vargas' side as he praised the Brazilian workers and their contribution to national development (and warned against backsliding by industrialists who did not respect the new atmosphere of worker/employer harmony).⁴

The industrialist leadership that emerged under Vargas explicitly rejected earlier approaches to the "social question" as not obeying principles of rational organization, and also acknowledged that "welfare capitalism" of the sort that characterized North American industrial relations during the 1920s was an impractical solution to the social question—both because, without coercion, most Brazilian industrialists would not provide a wide range of services and benefits to their workers, and because trade unions, however restricted and restrained, had become a permanent feature of the industrial landscape. At the same time, such key figures as Roberto Simonsen remained wary of the state and its susceptibility to popular (and "irrational") pressures. Despite strong support for Vargas' Estado Novo, these industrialists sought to limit the role of the state in industrial relations, both within and beyond the factory.

This Fordist tendency to straddle the line between private-sector

strategies and statist policies is illustrated by the creation of SENAI—the Serviço Nacional de Aprendizagem Industrial—a massive national network of manual training programs that combined vocational schooling with shopfloor experience. Initially conceived as a joint collaboration among the state, trade unions and employer associations, the final version of SENAI that emerged in 1942 made employers entirely responsible for the financing and running of the agency. Vargas' government issued the decree creating SENAI, and mandated monthly contributions from all urban-industrial employers, but otherwise SENAI was to have the juridical status of a private entity.⁵

Although the São Paulo industrialists, from the outset, regarded SENAI as an instrument of socialization as well as worker training, the industrial leadership regarded SENAI's objectives as too narrow and specific to create, on its own, a new working-class culture or a community of interests between employers and workers. Even in theory SENAI was meant to train fewer than 15 percent of the total manual labor force; it would only have a very indirect impact on unskilled and semi-skilled workers, or on members of workers' families who were not employed. Furthermore, the advantages of creating a more expansive social-welfare agency became apparent during the transition from the Vargas dictatorship to the elected presidency of General Eurico Dutra (1946-1950), as strikes erupted in every major industrial sector in São Paulo.⁶ In the midst of the 1946 strike movement—the first such movement since the repression of the mid-1930s—the industrial leadership founded the Serviço Social da Indústria (SESI). As in the case of SENAI, the federal government issued a decree establishing SESI, and made monthly contributions mandatory, but once again the service was to be entirely funded and operated by industrialists and their allies in the newly emerging "helping" professions.⁷

Unlike SENAI, with its relatively narrow focus on vocational education, SESI had been conceptualized broadly and ambitiously to provide a wide array of services to all urban workers and their families. Some of SESI's services were designed to provide material assistance to workers—these included discount food posts, medical and dental clinics, and hot lunches for factory workers. Even in these cases, however, the SESI directors were eager to emphasize that cultural and educational messages (intelligent consumerism, better personal hygiene, good nutritional habits, etc.) would be embedded in these operations. Most of SESI's activities, meanwhile, were explicitly educational and cultural in nature, and SESI's founders repeatedly designated these aspects of SESI's operations as fundamental to the objectives of the service, even suggesting that the

programs for material assistance be gradually phased out. Thus SESI founder Roberto Simonsen, in his inaugural address, described SESI as “perform[ing] a pedagogical and educational mission imbued with clear ethical and social values. The technical-vocational instruction of our workers...demands a complementary education that will permit the full civic development of the Working Man [Homem Trabalhador], integrated into his professional and social group. SESI will undoubtedly fulfill this objective. It will be the instrument par excellence for the diffusion of culture, for the popularization of cultural values in the proletarian milieu.” Furthermore, Simonsen viewed SESI as a means to create a “national” culture that could resist “foreign” (i.e., Communist) influences.⁸

SESI disseminated these social and cultural values in a variety of ways. Within a year of its founding SESI had initiated adult literacy classes in over 100 paulista factories, and that number would expand steadily over time. Not only did the primers used for these classes convey an idealized image of working-class life, but the instructors had explicit orders to emphasize the benefits of industrial employment and to elaborate on the importance of various holidays that industrialists regarded as crucial to the construction of a national culture. SESI’s social educators, affiliated with the service’s “Divisao de Orientação Social,” made thousands of factory visits to deliver lectures to workers and to disseminate SESI material. Social centers throughout the state of Sao Paulo provided workers with places to meet, hold celebrations, take courses, and engage in “healthy” recreational activities. SESI offered courses in sewing specifically as a means to make contact with working-class women, and eventually expanded this program to include over a half-dozen other domestic arts courses that hundreds of thousands of women in Sao Paulo attended during the 1950s.⁹

One of the most striking and original aspects of the SESI mission was its self-consciousness as a *class* project. Whereas traditional welfare capitalism, or even Fordism, primarily emphasized the benevolence, largesse or genius of a specific employer, SESI clearly aspired to establish the credentials of the industrial bourgeoisie as contributing collectively to technical advancement, material improvements and social peace. Indeed, when a leading chemical manufacturer in Sao Paulo, José Ermírio de Moraes, tried to wriggle out of making the monthly payments to SESI by claiming he already provided his workers with all the services SESI offered, the director of SESI assured him that the firm, Nitro-Química, fulfilled “almost all of SESI’s objectives...SESI also carries out a social policy and a program of social orientation that transcend the private ac-

tivities of a particular firm, and thus that firm cannot implement the entire mission attributed to SESI."¹⁰ SESI did offer subventions to firms if they could prove to the agency's social educators that they independently funded such services as hot lunches, occupational safety classes, and literacy instruction, but the maximum discount on the monthly payment was 50 percent. Thus SESI did not view itself as competing with or duplicating privately-run services, but as expanding them both in quantity and in scope, and in ways that allowed industrialists to address issues of working-class politics and culture on a scale that went beyond the confines of the individual factory.¹¹

SESI also portrayed itself as complementing or collaborating with services offered by trade unions. To be sure, this did not include *all* services offered by unions—SESI made no secret of the fact that it invested substantial resources in the discount food posts after the war so as to compete (successfully, as it turns out) with consumer cooperatives sponsored by Communist Party front groups during the final years of the Vargas dictatorship.¹² But this was an unusual case; the impoverished and weakened state of most labor unions following the repressive years of the Estado Novo meant that most lacked the resources to finance their own services and were quite eager to solicit funding from SESI. During the late 1940s SESI dispensed funds to labor unions for everything from dental benefits to sewing courses (usually for members' wives). SESI also funded union-organized vacation trips, film screenings and theatrical performances, though subsidies for the last two activities were available only if SESI staff deemed the content of the play or film acceptable. As one SESI official wrote, the purpose of such diversions was "to advance [the workers'] cultural and artistic development, giving them notions of social order [and] examples of positive human relations..."¹³ Some unions did prove reluctant to co-sponsor SESI seminars on labor legislation or syndicalism, as compared to the less blatantly politicized courses in literacy skills or sewing, but virtually every major union in Sao Paulo received and acknowledged funding from SESI during these years.

As should be apparent, those who conceptualized SESI's mission defined it in the broadest possible terms. While material benefits might contribute to greater productivity and produce more cooperative workers, Simonsen and his cohort sought, above all, to remake industrial culture in Brazil (employers' as well as workers') so as to inoculate Brazilian workers against the Communist "plague" and ensure social peace. According to Simonsen, by propagating Christian and democratic values, "SESI...will allow the Brazilian working masses to cross the Red Sea

of oppressive and inhumane totalitarianism without wetting their feet."¹⁴ Such a grandiose objective would require SESI to offer not only rationally organized welfare and educational services, but also to claim certain social and cultural spaces whose transformation would be crucial to the symbolic creation of an industrial community. This included industry-sponsored commemorations of such holidays as the Day of the Republic, Flag Day, and the Day of Industry. But the most prominent and ultimately controversial example was the First of May.

Prior to the Vargas dictatorship, May Day commemorations tended to be associated exclusively with working-class groups, and more specifically with small coteries of militant male workers who often ended up in some sort of confrontation with police authorities.¹⁵ To be sure, representatives of the Vargas regime in the 1930s often exaggerated the chaos and violence that characterized earlier observations of International Labor Day so as, by contrast, to highlight the new status, respectability, and dignity gained by workers since Vargas' ascent to power. Nevertheless, the pre-1930 commemorations certainly were quite different from the carefully choreographed manifestations of national unity and class cooperation that took place during the *Estado Novo*.¹⁶

Vargas' fall from power, and the election of Dutra to the presidency, initiated a period in which the state seemed to revert to pre-1930 techniques of suppressing labor militance. Faced with the first major wave of labor protests in over a decade, Dutra issued a decree that made almost all strikes illegal and oversaw federal intervention into 143 labor unions. The newly-elected president, who could be characterized as the anti-populist, also prohibited any independent labor demonstrations or rallies on May Day during his first year in office.¹⁷ So impressive was the police presence in Rio and Sao Paulo on the First of May that the press referred to "an unofficial state of siege," an image dramatically reinforced later that month when police in Rio opened fire on a Communist Party rally, wounding several workers.¹⁸

Sao Paulo's industrialists were by no means innocent bystanders in these events; leading members of FIESP openly encouraged the Dutra government to repress labor militancy and suppress the newly legalized Communist Party. By December of 1946 the lines between the Dutra government and the paulista industrialists became further blurred with the appointment of FIESP president, Morvan Dias de Figueiredo, as Minister of Labor. Portrayed by SESI as the "Minister of Social Peace," it was Morvan Dias who directly ordered the federal interventions into over 100 labor unions to remove "extremist elements" from their governing

bodies. At the same time, Morvan, Simonsen and their circle appreciated the limitations of this repressive strategy, and sought to construct a “positive” alternative to state-sponsored repression. It was in this spirit that SESI initiated its campaign to remake the First of May into a celebration of social peace and “fraternization” between capital and labor.

SESI resurrected certain features of the May Day celebrations of the Estado Novo—a ceremony was held in the Pacaembú soccer stadium with representatives from industry, the state government, and the labor federations in attendance. But Vargas had certain resources—announcements of new labor legislation, nascent nationalism, direct control over the labor unions—that SESI could not easily replicate. To make the May Day commemorations appealing to the “working masses,” SESI would have to resort to a new formula—something that would be exciting but orderly, that would put the spotlight on workers, but not on class struggle. The solution that SESI arrived at was the “Jogos Desportivos Operários,” an annual, month-long athletic competition to be initiated each year on the First of May.

The “Jogos Operários” began modestly; in 1947 some 2,500 worker-athletes from 150 sports clubs (almost all affiliated with manufacturing firms) participated. *O Metalúrgico*, the newspaper of the (recently intervened) metalworkers’ union, described the festivities in glowing terms, even as its May Day issue recalled the sacrifices of the “Martyrs of Chicago.”¹⁹ The number of participants in the Jogos Operários increased over the next few years, reaching 8,000 in 1950, but most of the SESI inner circle regarded this as unsatisfactory, and blamed the slow growth in participation and attendance on poor publicity efforts and apathy among factory-owners.²⁰

This led to a massive public-relations campaign by SESI in 1951, an effort that included the organization of an elaborate parade to precede the inauguration of the athletic tournament. In a number of ways the year 1951 was the ideal occasion for such a campaign. The election of Getúlio Vargas to the presidency in late 1950 briefly created a perfect “populist moment” during which industrialists, the state, and labor leaders could imagine a rough commonality of interests. The FIESP leadership praised the incoming president as a politician who “had always sought to establish cooperation among the different social classes and never sought to incite class conflict.”²¹ Furthermore, upon taking office, Vargas appointed Armando de Arruda Pereira, former president of FIESP and SESI, as mayor of São Paulo. Meanwhile, the reinvigorated labor unions, not yet subject to free and fair elections, continued to be led by conservative and

moderate leaders more than willing to collaborate with industrialist-sponsored activities. Some labor unions even pressured "apathetic" employers in their sector to sponsor floats and otherwise participate in the parade and athletic tournaments.²²

Whether it was the timing or the increased expenditure on publicity, the campaign was a great success: 13,211 athletes representing 486 different firms competed in the Jogos, while some 10,000 people participated in the parade. Moreover, the latter event significantly transformed the nature of the commemorations. Prior to 1951 the SESI festivities had included parades, but they were very simple affairs—inaugural processions in which representatives of the different sports clubs marched into the stadium with banners identifying the sponsoring firm. The 1951 parade, in contrast, was more diverse and elaborate. It included students from all the SENAI schools in the city of São Paulo, (non-athletic) delegations from dozens of factories, and students from SESI courses and programs throughout the metropolitan area. While some groups marched with simple banners, as in the previous parades, others included elaborate floats (*carros alegóricos*) and costumes, decorated jeeps, and fancy new equipment (usually the fire-fighting squads from the larger manufacturing firms). Factories that sponsored the most impressive floats and processions were awarded prizes and free publicity.²³

The parade also significantly increased the participation of women in the May Day events; female factory workers in intricate costumes decorated the floats and jeeps in the procession, and women from SESI's domestic-arts courses were among the most enthusiastic participants in the parade.²⁴ By the same token, the audience became more diverse in terms of age and gender, with whole families attending the festivities, whereas previously the athletic games had mainly appealed to male spectators. Women's teams also began to assert their right to enter the Jogos Operários, competing in track and volleyball tournaments.

The success of the 1951 festivities produced even greater interest in the event among employers, and in the following year some 40,000 workers participated in the parade and athletic competitions, and a much greater number came as spectators. Flushed with success, the president of FIESP and SESI, Antônio Devisate, circulated a notice to industrial employers in early 1953 with the following claim:

Conducted with a spirit that seeks to commemorate Labor Day in an atmosphere of social peace, suitable to the Christian character of Brazil's working class, the Jogos Operários have become,

*year after year, the high point of the May Day festivities in Sao Paulo, and the athletic tournaments...have succeeded in monopolizing the interest of the entire working population of the city and its surrounding areas.*²⁵

To be sure, Devisate was overstating the case. Individual unions in metropolitan Sao Paulo continued to hold their own observances and rallies, and a few of the more independent unions had long repudiated the SESI-sponsored festivities. Even before the founding of SESI, the union newspaper *O Trabalhador Gráfico* published an article by Edgard Leuenroth, an aging anarchist printer, that denounced the growing tendency to treat the First of May as a day of festivities. A 1950 issue of the printers' newspaper returned to the same theme, lamenting that young workers regarded May Day as a festive occasion, though the editors excused their younger colleagues by noting that "for the last twenty years, the First of May has been monopolized, managed, and exploited by the bourgeois class."²⁶

Albeit for different reasons, this commentary similarly overstated the capacity of SESI to monopolize May Day observances. Nonetheless, it is clear that by the early 1950s SESI-sponsored events were overwhelming the commemorations sponsored by organized labor. The parade was very effective in drawing big crowds as well as large numbers of participants, and the athletic tournaments had considerable popularity, especially among younger male workers. Of course, SESI sponsorship did not guarantee that May Day commemorations would adhere to the SESI line on social peace. An article in *O Trabalhador Gráfico* congratulating the printers in Santos for winning the 1950 May Day basketball championship in the port city revealed a rather unorthodox view of the tournament's meaning:

*[W]e wish to send our compliments to SESI's Regional Delegation in this city for the happy initiative, in which through this well-organized congress it gathered together the Santos workers in a healthy contest, more out of solidarity than for trophies, since the victory that we all desire is none other than understanding and solidarity among us workers, since only with such weapons can we make our rights count.*²⁷

In a somewhat different vein, SESI's headquarters in the state capital chastised its regional representative in Campinas for agreeing to speak at and fund the railroad workers' 1952 May Day festivities. Apparently, the railroaders' commemorations of the previous year had become too

“political” for SESI’s taste. The delegate defended his decision by saying that the union president assured him measures would be taken to avoid the “possible *degradation* of the spectacle into a political ‘meeting’ as happened the year before.”²⁸ But the delegate undoubtedly knew that once things were underway, he had little ability to keep the day’s events from taking a more explicitly political turn.

These qualifications aside, in early 1953 it seemed fairly reasonable to claim that SESI had made substantial progress in its campaign to transform a traditional commemoration of worker militancy and sacrifice into a celebration of “social peace.” The sense of triumph, however, would be shortlived due to two related developments in the sphere of labor relations. One was the holding of the much postponed open union elections, which brought in new leaders who were more independent and generally more militant than their predecessors; in some categories the rank and file even managed to dislodge deeply entrenched *pelegos* in the state labor federations. In other words, the new union leadership was less likely to be enthusiastic about collaborating with SESI, or about allowing an employer-run organization to define the temper of May Day observances.²⁹

Closely related to this development was the return of labor militancy to Sao Paulo in the form of the Strike of the 300,000, the largest general strike in Brazil’s history to that date. Beginning in March of 1953, workers in almost every sector of paulista industry walked off the job demanding higher pay. FIESP responded by urging police intervention and by criticizing the Vargas government for its “inaction” against the strikers.³⁰ Although the stoppage had ended by May 1st, the residual bitterness from the strike moved union leaders to promote a boycott of the SESI festivities. Articles on May Day in the metallurgical and construction workers’ newspapers stressed its historical significance as the “starting point of labor’s struggles” and urged union members to participate only in those commemorative activities endorsed by organized labor.³¹

The union campaign seems to have had some effect; participation in SESI-sponsored May Day activities dropped to 21,138 people statewide in 1953. Furthermore, SESI encountered even greater difficulty from 1953 on in recruiting union participation in its parades. Even in 1951 and 1952, few unions agreed to march *as unions* in the parade—most workers in the procession were representing their employers or SESI programs. And the union leaders who SESI typically invited to speak at the inaugural ceremonies (and who accepted the invitation) were old-line labor bosses such as Luiz Menossi, head of the Construction Workers’ Federation. After 1953 only two *sindicatos*, one of them the municipal trans-

port union, formally participated in the SESI festivities.

At this point, if the industrialist leadership had been inclined to adopt a sort of crude cost-benefit analysis, it might have reached the conclusion that the May Day festivities were costing more politically than they were worth, and that sacrificing the parades and tournaments in the interests of labor peace was probably a reasonable trade-off. But SESI and its industrialist patrons had already staked considerable political capital on the transformation of May Day, and their leverage *vis à vis* less “enlightened” employers would have declined considerably had they abandoned a campaign in which they had already invested so many resources. Indeed, SESI repeatedly used the May Day festivities and tournaments as a form of symbolic pressure to induce recalcitrant employers to make back payments they owed the service. For example, when the soccer team from Sao Paulo Light & Power won the SESI championship for the Santos region, the upper management of “Light” had no choice but to attend the award ceremony, even though the utility had accumulated a larger debt to SESI than any other employer in the state of Sao Paulo.³² Moreover, the SESI-sponsored May Day celebrations provided an excellent occasion for confirmation of the industrialists’ claim that “rank and file” workers sought cross-class cooperation, even if a small body of militants did its best to sow class resentment.

Another complication was the upcoming festivities to commemorate, in 1954, the 400th anniversary of Sao Paulo’s founding. It was especially important that SESI arrange a parade and tournament worthy of this gala year despite the censure from organized labor. In recognition of this, SESI’s regional council agreed to create a special fund of one million cruzeiros to promote the 1954 Jogos Operários and May Day Parade.³³ At that year’s spectacle an unusually large number of prominent politicians packed the viewing box and Governor Lucas Nogueira Garcez opened the commemorations. SESI estimated that 15,000 workers participated in the parade itself, and many more attended the festivities. However, the only union in evidence was the Construction Workers, and the only so-called “workers’ representative” who spoke at the inaugural ceremonies turned out to be a social worker from the Nadir Figueiredo glass factory. The printers’ newspaper, meanwhile, opened its May Day issue with the following denunciation:

Friends, we have arrived at May Day of 1954, a year of hunger, of energy shortages, of high prices and low wages, of bourgeois demagoguery and general scarcity. The job of softening us up...has

been prepared, as usual, by the employers' DIPs: SESIs, SESC's, etc. The schedule of Labor Day festivities has already been programmed: parades in Anhangabaú, worker gatherings, sports contests and other "spontaneous" demonstrations of gaiety.

The article ended by reminding its readers that the First of May is an occasion for protests "against those who, forgetting that class struggle is inseparable from the capitalist system, try to extinguish it by decree."³⁴

Despite the apparently steady decline in union support for the Sesi May Day activities, the mid-1950s actually created yet another moment when increased collaboration was possible. With the suicide of Getúlio Vargas in August 1954, his conservative vice-president, João Café Filho, took over the presidency and launched a brief period in which both labor and industry viewed the government as hostile to its interests.³⁵ In early 1956, at the very beginning of the Kubitschek presidency, several of the leading labor unions in São Paulo agreed to collaborate in Sesi's May Day festivities. According to Aldo Lombardi, general secretary of the metallurgical workers' union, Sesi's deeper pockets had routinely allowed the industrialist organization to stage more spectacular, and better-attended, activities than the labor unions, so the unions had therefore decided to try to take advantage of Sesi's large audience—a sort of "if you can't beat 'em, join 'em" strategy.³⁶

This collaboration continued, somewhat shakily, into 1957; for Labor Day of that year Sesi even expanded its commemorations to include an elaborate torchlight parade through the São Paulo industrial suburb of Santo André on May Day Eve.³⁷ But once again, the era of good feelings did not endure. In October of 1957 the metalworkers, printers, shoemakers and textile workers staged a ten-day walkout to protest the refusal of employers to accept a labor tribunal ruling in favor of a 25 percent wage increase. According to *O Metalúrgico*, FIESP responded by urging the police and civil guard to arrest, beat and harass the strikers. One major consequence of these events, claimed the metalworkers' newspaper, was that the strike "buried once and for all the 'social peace' proclaimed by the bosses and Sesi."³⁸

By the late 1950s and early 1960s, even the more moderate labor unions expressed their disapproval of Sesi's May Day celebrations. Thus the bakery workers' union urged its members to avoid commemorating Labor Day "with festivities of a recreational or athletic character, which is the way some pseudo-organizations for worker protection commemorate it every year, disparaging the true meaning of its histor-

ical content." *O Trabalhador Têxtil* called for a May Day celebration "independent of organizations such as Sesi, Sesc [Serviço Social do Comércio], and others that only entertain workers to deceive them." And the militant railroad workers went much further, predicting the imminent triumph of socialism and declaring that "the distortions practiced by Sesc and Sesi with their fanfare and festivals will be to no avail in obstructing the glorious day of the working class throughout the world."³⁹ Even the devoutly anti-communist labor boss Olavo Previatti, president of the paper workers' federation, distanced himself from Sesi during these years.⁴⁰

At this point the Sesi leadership apparently decided that the May Day parade, at least, was indeed more trouble than it was worth. In the early 1960s Sesi quietly retired this feature of its May Day festivities and returned to staging a more modest flag-raising ceremony to inaugurate the Jogos Operários. To be sure, no one in Sesi attributed this decision to union pressure. One official claimed that the parade had become too expensive and too competitive, with industrial firms protesting if they did not win first prize. Yet another official (in what became the routine explanation) claimed that the problem was too much traffic on the parade route through Anhangabaú—a particularly dubious assertion given that Labor Day is a holiday when traffic could easily be re-routed for a few hours.⁴¹

The parade's demise, however, did not affect the Jogos Desportivos Operários, which survived in somewhat reduced form during the early 1960s, and then thrived again under military rule in the late 1960s. The appeal of the athletic tournaments continued unabated, and proved quite effective in diverting the attention of young male workers from the more explicitly political, union-sponsored May Day activities. This is apparent not only from the statistics on worker participation issued by Sesi, but also from the way in which labor unions reacted to this challenge. In effect, they acknowledged the popularity of the games and responded by sponsoring their own athletic competitions, or tacitly accepting the union teams' participation in the Sesi-sponsored tournaments. Thus, when the textile workers' union in São Paulo declined to lend its playing field to Sesi for one of the May Day games, the union explained that it had organized its own athletic competition for the First of May and therefore would be using the field itself.⁴² Furthermore, it described the union-sponsored games as a key feature of the union's campaign to recruit new members.

In the same vein, an official of the printers' union, historically one

of the most combative in Sao Paulo, argued for the formation of a "Recreation Department" similar to the one already underway in the metallurgical workers' union. The official envisioned this explicitly as a way to compete with SESI's May Day competitions, "which mobilize large numbers of workers" every year.⁴³ These union-sponsored tournaments did offer a "classist" alternative to the SESI Jogos Operários, but at the same time the unions were acquiescing to a schedule of events on May Day that was more festive and less political. In effect, SESI had partially succeeded in redefining an annual event of considerable symbolic importance. While May Day did not become a celebration of social peace, it did lose the militant and confrontational character associated with earlier commemorations of the First of May.

Despite SESI's failure to monopolize commemorations of May Day in Sao Paulo, or to coopt organized labor into its celebrations of cross-class cooperation, virtually all accounts of the SESI-sponsored activities do emphasize their success in attracting not only participants, but large numbers of spectators. Aldo Lombardi's admission that the SESI festivities always attracted the largest crowds is revealing in a number of ways. Not only does it verify the genuine appeal of SESI's programs for the "working masses," but it also tells us that the working class in Sao Paulo did not necessarily organize its leisure time around the labor unions or other specifically classist activities, even on the First of May. Furthermore, it reinforces the notion that May Day had been definitively transformed from a day of rallies and protests, in which there was no significant distinction between spectator and participant, into a series of events in which performers and spectators were sharply differentiated. In this new version, the potential of a May Day activity to attract an *audience* became a crucial measure of its success.

Closely related to this last point is the transformation of May Day into a family affair, with sports competitions, picnics and parades replacing sectarian rallies and militant protests. However class conscious the latter might have been, they tended to exclude or marginalize women and children. In contrast, SESI's May Day festivities attracted entire families as spectators, and incorporated women and even children as participants. At the same time, women participated in ways that reinforced conventional gender roles, often serving as ornamentation on floats and jeeps, or sewing elaborate costumes. Despite their increased presence, women did not speak at the inaugural ceremonies, and SESI only gradually added women's teams to its athletic tournaments. Significantly, SESI refused a request from the textile union (the only major *sindicato* with a large

female membership) to add women's soccer to the Jogos Operários. Apparently, SESI officials regarded the Brazilian national pastime as an exclusively masculine affair.⁴⁴

While the composition of the participants had become somewhat more diverse, the representations of Brazilian industry, culture and tradition themselves displayed very little in the way of diversity. Judging from the photographs, most of the floats and costumes were predictable paeans to Western technology and progress, with images of Greco-Roman gods and goddesses far more common than any non-European elements from Brazilian popular culture. Even if working-class Brazilians of all racial and ethnic backgrounds participated in the parade, it was an unbridled celebration of modernity and technical innovation, identified entirely as European in origin.⁴⁵ As for standard symbols of labor militancy, not only were these absent, but some ceremonies highlighted images that could be seen as the antithesis of Labor Day traditions. For example, SESI's May Day festivities in 1962 featured a "performance" by the German shepherds of the Police Canine Corps.⁴⁶

Nevertheless, the popularity of SESI's May Day festivities raises the issue of whether we can talk about a specifically *working-class* culture in postwar São Paulo (as opposed to a popular culture that transcended work-related identities). Certainly the labor unions were growing in size and influence during the 1950s and early '60s, and it is clear that the more democratic local procedures led to the election of union leaders who were more radical and militant than those who had dominated the labor hierarchy in the late 1930s and 1940s. But we also know that relatively few workers participated in union activities, and probably even fewer organized their social and cultural lives around the union. And considering the ongoing masculinization of the industrial workforce, this would be even less the case for workers' wives and children.⁴⁷ Thus the unions' criticism of the SESI May Day activities did not necessarily deter even unionized workers from being participants in or spectators at the SESI festivities. Ironically, the union leadership was probably more effective in influencing the decisions of FIESP and SESI officials than it was in determining the behavior of its own rank and file.

The failure of SESI to incorporate unions as a regular feature of its May Day parades, and the growing criticism of this event from organized labor, tell us something about the difficulties of imagining an industrial community without the mediating role of the state. While both militant union leaders and FIESP officials espoused an ideology of na-

tional development in the 1950s that created considerable overlap in their vision of Brazilian society, conflicts over specific details—wages, job tenure, penalties for absenteeism—repeatedly foregrounded the significant differences in their conceptualization of industrial society. Whereas the state, whether under Vargas or Kubitschek, could affect a neutral, conciliatory, or even pro-worker position, FIESP (and by extension, SESI) had to attend first to the interests and sensitivities of its members. This was no obstacle to “social peace” during the Estado Novo, when unions were under tight government control, but it became much more problematic in the 1950s, as trade unions became more open and democratic, with their leaders depending upon rank and file support for their survival.⁴⁸

Furthermore, despite efforts by the industrialist leadership to shed the taint of paternalism, it was repeatedly apparent that union leaders interpreted benefits offered by employers differently from those “guaranteed” by the state.⁴⁹ For example, during the first few years of SESI’s existence Simonsen tried to resurrect Vargas’ tradition of announcing new concessions or protections for workers on the First of May. In 1947 he urged all employers to grant workers pay for Sundays and holidays, starting on May 1st. But instead of expressing gratitude, at least one labor newspaper sarcastically dismissed Simonsen’s “magnanimous gesture,” arguing that payment for Sundays and holidays should be established in the Brazilian constitution.⁵⁰ Although Vargas himself often referred to the labor reforms of his regime as an “*outorga*”—a gift or bequest from an enlightened government to a weak and vulnerable working class, labor leaders regularly reinterpreted these benefits as part and parcel of workers’ rights as citizens.⁵¹ In contrast, concessions from employers tended to be seen as paternalistic favors that could be granted but also withdrawn.

At first glance the efforts of these industrialists to forge a cross-class alliance with workers based on the promise of national development, better standards of living and social peace may seem little different from the objectives of populist politicians and corporatist ideologues. Yet there were significant differences, with populist discourse constructing working-class identity as a basis for claims to full citizenship in the public sphere, while industrialists sought to remove the whole issue of workers’ “rights and obligations” from the political realm. Labor leaders proved much more responsive to the nationalist imaginings of populist politicians and the allure of even a small share of state power, than they were to the efforts of industrialists to consolidate a quasi-private community of interests between employers and workers.

NOTES

1. While case studies by historians and anthropologists are starting to re-orient our view of the postwar period, the most influential texts continue to be works by political scientists and sociologists such as Florestan Fernandes, Octávio Ianni, Maria do Carmo Campello de Souza, Francisco Weffort, Maria Victória Benevides, and Fernando Henrique Cardoso.
2. The mania for Fordism was not confined to industrialists and technocrats; see Antonio Gramsci, "Americanism and Fordism," in *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (New York, 1971), 277-318; also see Mary Nolan, *Visions of Modernity: American Business and the Modernization of Germany* (Oxford, 1994).
3. For a much more extensive discussion of these issues, see Barbara Weinstein, *For Social Peace in Brazil: Industrialists and the Remaking of the Working Class in São Paulo, 1920-1964* (Chapel Hill, 1996), especially chapters 1-2.
4. On May Day commemorations under Vargas, see John D. French, *The Brazilian Workers' ABC: Class Conflict and Alliances in Modern São Paulo* (Chapel Hill, 1992), and Angela M. Castro Gomes, *A Invenção do Trabalhismo* (Rio, 1988).
5. On industrialist, the state and the founding of SENAI see Weinstein, *For Social Peace*, ch. 3, and M. Antonieta P. Leopoldi, "Industrial Associations and Politics in Contemporary Brazil," D.Phil. thesis, Oxford University, 1984. On opposition within the Vargas regime to industrialist control of SENAI, see Simon Schwartzman, H.M. Bousquet Bomeny and Vanda M. Ribeiro Costa, *Tempos de Capanema* (Rio de Janeiro, 1984), 239-41.
6. On the 1946 strike wave see Ricardo Maranhão, *Sindicatos e Democratização: Brasil, 1945-1950* (São Paulo, 1979) and Salvador A.M. Sandoval, *Social Change and Labor Unrest in Brazil since 1945* (Boulder, 1993).
7. The creation of SENAI and Sesi greatly increased demand for social workers, adult educators, industrial psychologists and occupational safety experts. See Weinstein, *For Social Peace*, ch. 4. Among those who began their careers as adult educators with Sesi was Paulo Freire, who directed Sesi's literacy programs in Recife during the 1950s.
8. Roberto Simonsen, "O Problema Social no Brasil," reprinted in *Evolução Industrial do Brasil* (São Paulo, 1973), pp. 443-454.
9. For more on the early Sesi operations in São Paulo see Weinstein, *For Social Peace*, especially chapter 4. On Sesi's programs for working-class women, see Weinstein, "Unskilled Worker, Skilled Housewife: Remaking the Working-Class Woman in São Paulo," in John French and Daniel James, eds., *The Gendered Worlds of Latin American Women Workers* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997).
10. Arquivo Geral do Sesi-São Paulo (AG), Processos, P34/616, Sept. 29, 1947 (emphasis in original).

11. Sesi was also insistent that its programs for workers did not amount to "paternalism" since they did not originate with the individual employer. Mário Goulart Reis, *O Serviço Social da Indústria como Instituição* (Porto Alegre, 1955).
12. Sesi-Sao Paulo, Atas do Conselho Regional, July 10, 1946. See also Robert J. Alexander, *Labor Relations in Argentina, Brazil, and Chile* (New York, 1962), p. 108.
13. *SESI—18 Anos: Divisão de Orientação Social* (Sao Paulo, 1965), p. 165. On Sesi funding of labor union activities, see Weinstein, *For Social Peace*, pp. 155-160.
14. Simonsen, "Discurso pronunciado a 25 de julho de 1946 em Sao Paulo, na instalação do 1o Conselho Consultivo do Sesi" (Sao Paulo, 1946), p. 14.
15. On the pre-1930s May Day traditions, see Gomes, *A Invenção do Trabalhismo*, p. 235.
16. For a similar representation of earlier May Day commemorations in the context of Peronist Argentina, see Daniel James, *Resistance and Integration: Peronism and the Argentine Working Class, 1946-1976* (Cambridge, 1988).
17. There are very few serious studies of labor under Dutra, perhaps because his administration, with its apparent lack of concern for popular support, seems so out of step with the so-called "Populist Republic" (1945-64). For some discussion of the Dutra years, see Joel Wolfe, *Working Women, Working Men: Sao Paulo and the Rise of Brazil's Industrial Working Class, 1900-1955* (Durham, 1993), ch. 5.
18. The latter event became known as the Massacre of the Largo do Carioca. Edgard Carone, *A Quarta República, 1945-1964* (Sao Paulo, 1980), p. 11.
19. "Primeiro de Maio," *O Metalúrgico*, May 1947, p. 1.
20. Sesi-SP, Atas, April 22, 1948. The slow growth was even more troubling given federal bans on "open" May Day commemorations in 1948 due to renewed "illegal" strike activity. *O Metalúrgico*, May 1948, p. 1.
21. *Boletim Informativo da FIESP* 71 (Feb. 21, 1951): 1-2.
22. AG-SESI, Processos, P79/78, April 13, 1954.
23. For a detailed description of the Sesi parade, see *SESI Jornal*, May 31, 1951, p. 1.
24. On Sesi's Centros de Aprendizado Doméstico see Weinstein, "Unskilled Worker, Skilled Housewife."
25. Sao Paulo Light & Power, Arquivo, Sesi, P1, March 1953.
26. *TG*, April 1945, p.4; May 25, 1950, p. 9.
27. *TG*, Aug. 1950, p. 4.
28. AG-SESI, Processos, P79/79/1186, Apr. 15, 16, 25, 1952.
29. The term "pelego" refers to ministerialist union bosses who owed their jobs to support from the Ministry of Labor, not the rank and file.
30. On the 1953 strike see Joel Wolfe, *Working Women, Working Men*, ch. 6.
31. Weinstein, *For Social Peace*, p. 208.
32. Light, Arquivo, Sesi, P1, May 8, 1950.

33. SESI-SP, Atas, March 12, 1954.
34. *TG*, Apr.-May 1954, pp. 1-2. DIPS refers to the Departamento de Informação e Propaganda Social, which organized May Day events (and oversaw censorship) during the Vargas dictatorship.
35. Café Filho, a right-wing military officer, was a member of the Uniao Democrática Nacional, an anti-Vargas party critical of government-sponsored industrialization. On this period see Thomas E. Skidmore, *Politics in Brazil, 1930-1964* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), 142-162.
36. Interview with Aldo Lombardi, April 17, 1956, Robert Alexander Archive, Rutgers University.
37. "Programadas Grandes Festividades para Comemorar o Primeiro de Maio," *TG*, April 1957, p. 8. Although this article was clearly referring to the SESI-sponsored festivities, it is interesting that it never mentioned SESI by name.
38. "Paz Social," *O Metalúrgico*, Feb. 1958, p. 2.
39. *A Massa*, April 1962, p. 1; *O Trabalhador Têxtil*, Jan. 1958, p. 5; *O Trilho*, May 1963, p. 2.
40. Weinstein, *For Social Peace*, p. 293.
41. SESI-SP, Atas, Feb. 24, Apr. 7, 1961; *SESI—18 Anos*, p. 138.
42. AG-SESI, P79/78, STIFT-SP to SESI, Mar. 19, 1954.
43. *TG*, March 1960, p. 8. In a different vein the textile workers' union in Campinas requested funding from SESI to organize a May Day trip to a resort town to help "inculcate moral and Christian principles" in its membership. The union received 5,000 cruzeiros. AG-SESI, P79/78/3304/3305, March 30, 1959.
44. AG-SESI, P79/78, April 2, 1963. Among the excuses offered by SESI was the claim that the regular officials would not officiate women's soccer.
45. The best visual source for the May Day parades is the excellent collection of photographs in SENAI's "Núcleo de Memória" in São Paulo. This collection is discussed in *O Visual do Trabalho: Organização e Preservação de Fotografias no SENAI-SP* (São Paulo: SENAI-SP, 1995).
46. *Boletim Informativo da FIESP* 658 (May 16, 1962): 119. This performance took place less than two years before the military seizure of power—which FIESP would avidly support.
47. The contemporary shopfloor studies done by Brazilian sociologists were based on an overly narrow conceptualization of class and class consciousness, but they did convincingly demonstrate that few workers in the late 1950s and early '60s looked to their unions as a source of social support, political guidance or recreational activity. See, for example, Leôncio Martins Rodrigues, *Conflito Industrial e Sindicalismo no Brasil* (São Paulo, 1966). On the masculinization of the labor force see Weinstein, *For Social Peace*, pp. 193-94.
48. For more on the "sensitivities" of the industrial elite, see Maria José Trevisan, *50 Anos em 5: A FIESP e o Desenvolvimentismo* (Petrópolis: Vozes, 1986).

49. Of course, the passage of a labor law did not necessarily mean that the law would be enforced, but at least it could be claimed as a worker's right. See John D. French, "Labor Law as Virtual Reality: The Quest to Realize the Imaginary," paper presented at the 13th Conference on Latin American Labor History, Duke University, Durham, April 1996.
50. *O Trabalhador Gráfico*, May 25, 1947, p. 7.
51. On Vargas' representation of labor reforms as an "outorga," see John D. French, "The Origins of Corporatist State Intervention in Brazilian Industrial Relations, 1930-1934," *Luso-Brazilian Review* 28, 2 (1991): 13-26.