

VISENTINI, Paulo Fagundes. *Brazilian Authoritarian Thought and the World Crisis: Reflections of Francisco Campos in the Interwar Period.*

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Paulo Visentini's² latest book focuses on an unusual theme for an already established author with several works published on Contemporary World History and International Relations. It is a study that finds in Francisco Campos the vertex that links the global crisis in the interwar period with Brazilian authoritarian thought and the genesis of Estado Novo. While the author himself is quick to downplay the importance of the book as a product of his academic youth, it nevertheless stands as a seminal work. Publishing the study 40 years later is justified by the similarity between the period analysed and current events, in which a global transitional crisis enhanced authoritarian political manifestations, both on a national and global levels.

The topics of interest range from the History of Brazil through the History of Ideas – the genesis of authoritarian thought in Brazil and worldwide in the interwar period –, Brazilian Foreign Policy, the Vargas Era, urbanisation, industrialisation, and the emergence of mass society. The

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guiding thread is the life and work of Francisco Campos. He was Secretary of State in Minas Gerais and in the Federal District, federal deputy, minister, and representative of Brazil in the Inter-American Commission. He drafted the Brazilian Constitution of 1937 and the Institutional Act n.1 (1964), having passed away in 1968 (Visentini 2023, 80).

The book does not express a formal commitment to carry out a biography, although it masterfully fulfils this task. However, it is presided over by the tacit commitment to find the place of human consciousness in the face of an inexorable need – prompted by the Second Industrial Revolution (Visentini 2023, 35) – which, in its frenzy, threatened to destroy the social fabric, the foundations of public life, and lead Brazil to be deprived of its essence and emerge into chaos.

It is remarkable that the author, in 1983, defending a dissertation in Political Science, intuitively already perceived that the determinants move from structures (the third image) to units (countries) – exactly as proposed by Waltz (2002, 155; Visentini 2023, 28). So that the “cause” of Francisco Campos’ thought is the global crisis prompted by the industrial revolution and mass society (Visentini 2003, 35-89). The publication of this “youth work” is consistent with this perception.

Moreover, the book infers a warning to the present about the risks involving the Fourth Industrial Revolution, while at the same time demonstrating, by rescuing Campos’ thought, that Brazil has already faced this challenge before successfully. And thus, it can do so again.

The book projects the future through the past and the challenges of the present through historical narrative, rigorously and richly documented. Therefore, even though the book is based on abundant documentary sources and frequently gives voice to the biographer himself in the form of direct quotations, it is about a Campos who is reorganised as a demiurge of consciousness. In this condition, he is stripped of his idiosyncrasies and assumes the role of a subject who imposes himself, facing adverse fortune, to develop *virtù* – preparing society and the state to control change. Through this path, biographer and biographed are associated with the foundational thinker of modern Political Philosophy: Niccolò Machiavelli, for whom dams and canals (*virtù*) should be built in order to, during floods, be able to contain the waters of the mighty river (*fortuna*) (Machiavelli 2017, 102).

Despite the numerous positions he held, Francisco Campos had difficulties dealing with the practical aspects of politics (Visentini 2023, 75). However, it was precisely this relative isolation from his contemporaries, his intelligence, and powerful imagination that allowed him to perceive the threshold and dimensions of the impending change. Francisco Campos

moved against four major threats: (1) mass society; (2) urbanisation; (3) industrialisation; and (4) mass media. In Campos' perception, these were formidable challenges, especially the first. They could not be conjured away, as they were imposed on Brazil from the outside. Given their totalising nature, they required a comprehensive reformulation of the state and society.

Even before the 1930 evolution, as Secretary of the Interior of the State of Minas Gerais (1926-1930), Francisco Campos promoted education reform (Visentini 2023, 76). It was the weapon the intellectual relied on to oppose fascism, which was based on mobilisation and political violence (Visentini 2023, 127). As mentioned above, with Vargas Campos wrote the Constitution of 1937. The intention was that, through it, a reformulation of the state would occur, so that it could be robust enough to effectively carry out the task of social control (Visentini 2023, 130).

The starting point in this process was political centralisation, indispensable for the state to be able to achieve the concentration of means of payment in the hands of the federal government, allowing for investment and promotion (Visentini 2023, 90). In short, using the terminology of Celso Furtado here, it was about ensuring the Brazilian economic decision-making axis – defined by the possession of the elements that substantiate the ability of a community to self-determine and distribute its social products (Furtado 1962, 115-116). Thanks to this, the state was able to control change as the formation of the national industry allowed it to scale and smooth the contours of its impact.

Moreover, signs of a World War were already visible (Visentini 2023, 132). Due to the competition for markets and raw materials prompted by the Second Industrial Revolution, a series of conflicts erupted, in the face of which the League of Nations proved powerless. Confrontations in Asia, Africa, Europe, and even in South America – the Chaco War (1932-1935) – brought to the fore military preparation in Brazil.

Due to the centralisation prompted by the *Estado Novo*, the rupture with the Old Republic, and with it its reactionary liberalism and oligarchic democracy, was made possible. Francisco Campos was right: the alternatives then lay between exclusionary liberal oligarchic democracy ("formal") or inclusive hegemony ("substantive democracy") (Visentini 2023, 130). The phenomenon was not exclusively Brazilian: the experiences of Cárdenas (1934-1940) in Mexico and Perón (1946-1955) in Argentina also illustrated that the "Latin American political tradition has always been more linked to the valorisation of social or substantive democracy, relegating the pursuit of political democracy as a mere formal democracy" (Trindade 1990, 155). Furthermore, for Campos, liberal democracy was "improvident" (Visentini

2023, 154), and therefore powerless in the face of the impending challenges, such as the “socialist threat.”

Thanks to the *Estado Novo*, Brazil managed to effectively initiate the endogenization of the Second Industrial Revolution (electricity and steel). This was due to the pragmatic bargain (Visentini 1995, 33) made between the US and Germany, which ensured the construction of the Volta Redonda Steelworks. Additionally, it succeeded in military preparation to join World War II alongside the winning bloc. This occurred through the Brazilian Expeditionary Force (FEB), to which the characteristics of the National Army are owed to this day.

Virtuous industrialisation in the Vargas Era and during the Military Regime followed the crisis of the import substitution model – it was the embodiment of the legacy of the Second Industrial Revolution. This process coincided with the end of the Cold War (1985-1989) and the establishment of unipolarity (1991-2017). In this scenario, it was unfeasible to carry out any kind of diplomatic bargain (Visentini 1995, 63) to internalise the Third Industrial Revolution (microchip and fibre optics). Additionally, internal management problems played a role, which will be discussed later.

It is important to highlight that the Third Industrial Revolution altered the balance of power established by its earlier phases. In 1820, when the Industrial Revolution was still in its infancy, the West possessed 14% of the world population and 25% of income. By 1950, after a century and a half of industrialism, the West increased its share of income to 56%, while maintaining its population at 17% (Radelet; Sachs 1997, 44). Indeed, it was the Industrial Revolution – accompanied by scientific and political revolution – that led to the West’s supremacy over the East (Parker 2021, 273; McNeill 1972, 418). Unbridled privatisations in China, Russia, and India brought 3 billion human beings into the market, including 1.5 billion skilled professionals (Friedman 2014, 248). Due to digitalisation, which enabled flexible production, segment production and the denationalisation of the industrial base soon followed. As a result of this process, industries shifted from the West to the East (Visentini 2004, 24-27; Miller 2023, 87). And now, Asia threatens to dethrone the West in the primacy of the current Industrial Revolution.

With the return of great power competition (EUA 2017; 2018) and the possibility of a new world war, once again diplomatic bargaining comes to the forefront (Visentini 1995, 63). Despite occasional discontinuities, Brazil has sought to carry this policy, notably through its participation in the G20 and BRICS groupings. Once again, it becomes possible to place foreign policy at the forefront of development policies, leveraging the relative decline of the US to obtain, whether from the Americans or the Chinese, the inputs of the

Third Industrial Revolution, and what constitutes the decision-making axis of the Fourth Industrial Revolution: Artificial Intelligence (AI) and quantum computing.

If the Second Industrial Revolution altered the geographical space by moving people from the countryside to the city, the Fourth Industrial Revolution will be accompanied by an equally drastic shift: the impact of climate change destroying the public goods of civilization. In contrast, telecommunications technology will allow for the redistribution of populations into smaller cities or even uninhabited areas. As a result, mass society, whose crowd behaviour (rightly so) frightened Francisco Campos (Visentini 2023, 89), may give way to something even more complex: an atomised, hedonistic, narcissistic society, with individuals indifferent to everything beyond their immediate physical surroundings.

The Second Industrial Revolution also brought about intensive capital concentration and the advent of State Monopoly Capitalism. As for the Fourth Revolution, in its second phase, with AI and quantisation³ (chips, computers, and quantum communication), it will instead empower large companies. Consequently, these may seek to abolish state mediation and take over the administration of public services – including security and defence – as ordinary parts of their assets. If with electricity came mass communication media (broadcasting), with the Fourth Revolution will come neural networks, which, when combined with satellites, will allow the formation of transcontinental societies, indifferent to borders or any territorial or jurisdictional reference.

In short, all the reasons that compelled Campos to pursue the restructuring of society and the state to address the deleterious effects of change are now present with equal, if not greater, intensity. But unlike what happened in the context of the Third Industrial Revolution, in which Brazil's part was precarious, the inability to insert itself into the Fourth Revolution entails the risk of a catastrophic collapse.

It is worth remembering that, at the time of the Third Industrial Revolution, privatisations worldwide aimed to generate liquidity to leverage the development of new technologies (Vizentini 1992, 21). However, in Brazil, they ended up serving only to sustain the parity of the Real with the dollar, seen as indispensable for the re-election of then-president Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1998). Mindful of the risk of social fabric collapse resulting from

³ Quantisation – “In quantum physics, the phenomenon where observable quantities take on discrete values; the transition from a system described classically to one described by quantum mechanics” (Houaiss; Villar 2001, 2345). This definition applies to chip architectures that do not adhere to a binary process, to computers with expanded processing capacity, as well as to photon-based communication.

privatisations (Visentini 2004, 30), which removed the indirect subsidy of the state sector from the economy, Bresser-Pereira conceived the “Non-State Public Sphere” (Bresser-Pereira; Grau 1999, 16-17). This was an incipient, still timid, version of projecting the creation of an “Extended State” (Buci-Glucksmann 1980, 358)⁴. Both Bresser-Pereira’s (1999) “Public Sphere” and Buci-Glucksmann’s “Extended State” (1980) address Francisco Campos’s concern: to maintain a robust public sector capable of mass control – albeit, in this case, not only at the expense of the treasury. Similarly, hybrid forms of associated management, uniting different federated entities, or public-private partnerships, should take the place of state-owned enterprises in leveraging the national economy – the public consortium (Salles 2021, 87). Thus, these would serve to ensure the dynamism of a competitive private sector and the efficiency of an austere state.

This pathway remains open. However, to glimpse the solution, it’s necessary first to discern the problem. Here, it’s important to recognise the short-sightedness of the political forces, which maintain their ordinary disputes at the expense of trivialising the debate. Campos’ legacy leaves conservatives with the lesson that they were the architects of the National State, both in the Vargas Era and during the Military Regime. Therefore, they cannot pretend to maintain their identity as such and at the same time dispense with the state. This was, is, and, in a foreseeable horizon of events, will continue to be the main mechanism of social control – even in its extended form, funded also by off-budget resources.

Thanks to conservative thought, the Estado Novo was able to preemptively take from the left the protection of workers; from liberals, the defence of democracy beyond formalism; and confront the reactionary tendencies of conservatives themselves, controlling change through anticipation. Thus, Francisco Campos leaves a challenge to liberals: to what extent is liberalism compatible with democracy? After all, the trivialisation of the use of totalitarian techniques by liberalism implies getting rid of democracy and thus of its own political ideal (Visentini 2023, 129). Lastly, to the left, he presents the challenge of overcoming the atomisation of identity politics and joining the ranks of the struggle for reindustrialisation and the debate around a national project.

This is precisely what Visentini’s thesis does. It establishes recognition standards so that, in light of Brazil’s experience facing the Second Industrial

4 Extended State – This refers to an Integral State where the political society and civil society integrate and interpenetrate. In Gramsci’s words, “hegemony armoured by coercion.” Interestingly, the goal of the Marxist theorist was to replace the state *stricto sensu* with a regulated society, which has become the dream of modern liberals (Buci-Glucksmann 1980, 358).

Revolution, there are references for the sharpness of the challenges and opportunities posed by the Fourth Industrial Revolution. After all, mechanical solutions (legal and administrative instruments) may be available, but they will not be properly identified or used without the recognition of the problems they intend to solve.

Thus, the man and the book use education to create, based on the perception of the importance of International Relations, a strategic culture that allows us to become contemporaries of our time – as Francisco Campos was in his. The education path, as a way to disseminate Strategic Culture, has as its synthesis the understanding of foreign policy as the centre of national development. In descriptive terms, this translates into the resumption of diplomatic bargaining, exploiting the rivalries between great powers. In particular, leveraging the imperial confrontations that often take place during world wars – which would allow Brazil to acquire economic decision-making power –, holding and expanding its sovereignty, enhancing the country's international insertion and the well-being of its people.

Translated by Guilherme Thudium

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