

*Countering the Red Menace: Anticommunist Diplomacy and the
Transformation of German-Brazilian relations 1933-1938*

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Introduction

On the evening of 23 November 1935, an uprising broke out in the barracks of the 21st *Batalhão de Caçadores* stationed in the city of Natal in northeastern Brazil. On that day, rumors about the dismissal of military personnel accused of affiliation with subversive organizations began to spread within the ranks. Revolt began to brew within the battalion. Fearful of a purge, sergeants and soldiers sympathetic to the Partido Comunista do Brasil (Communist Party of Brazil, PCB) and the popular front organization under its auspices, the Aliança Nacional Libertadora (National Liberation Alliance, ANL), began to mobilize, seeking to avoid the dismissal of their comrades as well as their own. The insurgents, led by sergeants Quintino Clementino and Eliziel Diniz Henriques, swiftly took control of the military facility, arresting their officers “in the name of captain Luiz Carlos Prestes” and signaling to their civilian supporters that the time for the Brazilian revolution had come.

The events in Natal were a prelude to the unrest that spread across the country. In the following days, similar uprisings occurred in the city of Recife, in the nearby state of Pernambuco, and in the capital of the republic, Rio de Janeiro. These uprisings, however, would not share the same success as their comrades in Natal. The mutinies in Recife and Rio de Janeiro were swiftly suppressed by the forces loyal to President Getúlio Vargas, with Natal falling thereafter on November 27, thereby marking the end of the 1935 communist uprisings in Brazil.

The events of November 1935 in Natal, Recife, and Rio de Janeiro constitute a critical moment in the history of Brazil during the interwar period, as well as in the development of the nascent communist movement within the country. The significance of these events is underscored by the

extensive body of scholarship dedicated to examining thoroughly their origins, development, and consequences, particularly over the past 40 years.¹ These studies, however, tend to focus primarily on the movements and individuals involved in the planning and execution of the 1935 uprisings, thereby emphasizing the incident's significance to the historiography of the Brazilian communist movement and to the analysis of the role played by these actors in shaping national politics. As a result of this emphasis, actors and ideologies opposed to the communist uprisings of 1935 are often treated in an instrumental manner in the existing historiography. Dedicated works analyzing anticommunism and its proponents remain relatively scarce, though some notable exceptions exist.

In the realm of institutional politics, the work of historian Elizabeth Cancelli is particularly significant. In her book *O Mundo da Violência*, she offers an in-depth analysis of the co-optation of the Brazilian state's coercive apparatus by Getúlio Vargas and his political allies. Cancelli explores how the Vargas regime expanded and institutionalized mechanisms of repression, particularly during the Estado Novo period, using state violence to suppress political dissent and consolidate authoritarian control. In chapter 3, Cancelli gives special attention to the repression of communism, arguing that anticommunism served as a crucial catalyst for the reforms of the Brazilian state's repressive apparatus, which subsequently helped engender Getúlio Vargas's authoritarian regime.²

¹ The historiography surrounding the 1935 communist uprisings gained new momentum after the fall of the civil-military dictatorship in Brazil in 1985. Examples of works that have since then addressed this topic include: Nelson Werneck Sodré, *A Intentona Comunista de 1935* (Porto Alegre: Mercado Aberto, 1986); Marly Gomes Vianna, *Revolucionários de 1935: Sonho e Realidade* (São Paulo: Expressão Popular, 2007); Homero de Oliveira Costa, *A insurreição comunista de 1935* (Edufrn, 2015); Anita Leocádia Prestes, *Luiz Carlos Prestes: Um Comunista Brasileiro*, 1ª edição (São Paulo, SP: Boitempo Editorial, 2015).

² See: Elizabeth Cancelli, *O Mundo Da Violência: A Polícia Da Era Vargas*, 2nd ed. (Brasília: UnB, 1994).

In turn, with regard to the anticommunist ideology that underpinned Vargas's repressive policies, the work "*Em guarda contra o perigo vermelho*" by historian Rodrigo Patto Sá Motta deserves particular attention. In his work, Motta identified three “matrices” that formed the core of Brazil’s anticommunist discourses: Catholicism, which depicted communism as a threat to religious values and social morality; Nationalism, which framed communism as a foreign ideology that endangered Brazil’s sovereignty and national unity; and Liberalism, which emphasized the defense of individual freedoms and private property against the forceful seizure of the means of production advocated by communism. Motta's work represents one of the most sophisticated analyses of the tropes employed in the construction of the anticommunist imaginary within Brazilian society, offering significant conceptual contributions to the present study.

Despite their seminal significance, the works by Cancelli and Motta maintain a geographic scope that parallels most works pertaining the 1935 uprisings, centering their analyses predominantly on domestic political dynamics. Works focused on Brazilian foreign policy during the Vargas period similarly give only cursory attention to the influence of anticommunism on Brazil's diplomatic agenda. Foundational works on Brazil's international relations during the interwar period, such as those by political scientist Ricardo Seitenfus, allocate no more than a few paragraphs to the subject, despite acknowledging the significance of anticommunism in shaping bilateral relations between Brazil and Germany.³ Research specifically focused on diplomatic relations between the two

³ Ricardo Antônio Silva Seitenfus, *O Brasil de Getúlio Vargas e a Formação Dos Blocos, 1930-1942: O Processo Do Envolvimento Brasileiro Na II Guerra Mundial*, Brasiliense. Grande Formato, v. 22 (São Paulo, SP, Brasil: Companhia Editora Nacional, 1985).

countries has largely neglected the issue of anticommunism, favoring instead themes concerning the German ethnic communities in Brazil and their connections with the Third Reich.⁴

English- and German-language historiographies have shown greater receptiveness to the study of anticommunism from a transnational perspective. Particularly in the first decades of the 21st century, the number of works examining the transnational ramifications of National Socialist anticommunism increased significantly, though few engage in-depth with its implications in Latin America.⁵ Among those focusing on the diplomatic and cultural relations between Germany and Brazil, the tendency observed in Portuguese-language historiography is repeated, where themes of immigration and the interference of the Nazi Party (NSDAP) in German colonies, particularly in southern Brazil, predominate.⁶

The present study, therefore, seeks to address the existing gap in the literature concerning the role of anticommunism in shaping the relations between the Brazilian government under Getúlio Vargas and the Third Reich. It argues that the communist uprisings in Brazil in November 1935

⁴ See, for instance: Ana Maria Dietrich, "O Nazismo Tropical? O Partido Nazista No Brasil" (PhD Dissertation, São Paulo, Universidade de São Paulo, 2007), https://scholar.archive.org/work/wu57vxn5ojh3bgpfpkqphwicm3y/access/wayback/http://www.teses.usp.br/teses/disponiveis/8/8138/tde-10072007-113709/publico/TESE_ANA_MARIA_DIETRICH.pdf.

⁵ See, for instance: Norbert Frei and Hermann Kling, *Der nationalsozialistische Krieg* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verl, 1990); Lorna Waddington, *Hitler's Crusade: Bolshevism and the Myth of the International Jewish Conspiracy* (London New York: Tauris Academic Studies, 2007); Hermann Weber, Ákov Samojlovič Drabkin, and Bernhard H. Bayerlein, *Deutschland, Russland, Komintern: nach der Archivrevolution, neuerschlossene Quellen zu der Geschichte der KPD und den deutsch-russischen Beziehungen*, Archive des Kommunismus--Pfade des XX. Jahrhunderts, Band 6 1-2 (Berlin Boston: De Gruyter, 2015); Norbert Frei and Dominik Rigoll, *Der Antikommunismus in seiner Epoche: Weltanschauung und Politik in Deutschland, Europa und den USA*, Vorträge und Kolloquien, Band 21 (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2017); Ki Woo Hwang, "Der Antikommunismus Und Antisemitismus in Der Nationalsozialistischen Kulturpolitik Gegenüber Japan" (PhD Dissertation, Berlin, Freie Universität Berlin, 2013).

⁶ Jürgen Müller, *Nationalsozialismus in Lateinamerika: Die Auslandsorganisation Der NSDAP in Argentinien, Brasilien, Chile Und Mexiko, 1931-1945*, Historamericana, Bd. 3 (Stuttgart: Heinz, 1997); Glen S. Goodman, "The Enduring Politics of German-Brazilian Ethnicity," *German History* 33, no. 3 (September 2015): 423–38, <https://doi.org/10.1093/gerhis/ghv083>; Frederik Schulze, "Auswanderung als nationalistisches Projekt: 'Deutschtum' und Kolonialdiskurse im südlichen Brasilien (1824-1941)," *Lateinamerikanische Forschungen*, Band 46 (Köln, Bohlau Verlag, 2016).

served as a catalyst for the rapprochement between Brazil and Germany, introducing a political-ideological dimension to the trade negotiations that had been ongoing since 1934. To achieve this, it employs theoretical frameworks from international and transnational history, drawing on both diplomatic sources and documents from non-state actors to trace the circulation of anticommunist ideas between Brazil and Germany and assess how these ideas influenced the formulation of their respective foreign policies.

The analysis is structured into four chapters, addressing the distinct phases of the anticommunist collaboration between Brazil and Germany. Chapter 1 discusses the historical context preceding the incorporation of anticommunism into the bilateral diplomatic agenda between the Hitler and Vargas regimes. It focuses on the period from 1930, when Vargas came to power in Brazil, to 1934, examining the emerging ideological convergence between Brazilian authorities and the Nazi regime, as well as the implementation in Brazil of measures modeled after the Nazi authoritarian consolidation of power.

Chapter 2 examines the domestic and international contexts in which the communist uprisings in Brazil took place. It analyzes Brazil's position vis-à-vis the Good Neighbor Policy promoted by the United States, as well as the economic interests that favored the rapprochement with Germany. Furthermore, this chapter examines the events in Brazil leading up to the 1935 communist uprisings and outlines the early stages of German-Brazilian anticommunist collaboration.

In turn, Chapter 3 explores the most active phase of the German-Brazilian anticommunist collaboration, detailing the operational measures implemented by key institutions on both sides of the Atlantic, including intelligence sharing, diplomatic coordination, and technical exchanges. It examines the central role played by the embassies of both nations in supporting and expanding

these efforts, acting as important channels for communication and cooperation. Additionally, the chapter addresses the discussions and negotiations regarding the potential inclusion of Brazil in the Anti-Comintern Pact, highlighting the geopolitical considerations and diplomatic maneuvers involved in these talks.

Lastly, Chapter 4 delves into the collapse of the German-Brazilian partnership, which was driven by shifts in the geopolitical landscape during the late 1930s and early 1940s. As global tensions escalated and Brazil's relationship with the United States deepened, the Vargas regime gradually distanced itself from its earlier collaboration with Nazi Germany. This chapter explores how Brazil's repressive and propaganda apparatus, once aligned with Germany in combating communism, was redirected towards a policy of "nationalization," targeting the ethnic German communities within Brazil. The focus shifted from anticommunist collaboration to a campaign targeting the assimilation and integration of these communities, reflecting growing concerns over their loyalty and potential ties to the Nazi regime. The chapter analyzes the political and ideological factors behind this realignment, as well as the broader international pressures that contributed to the unraveling of German-Brazilian relations during this period. Through this lens, it offers insight into how domestic priorities and foreign alliances were recalibrated in response to changing global dynamics.

Chapter

1. An Emerging Affinity: Anticommunism and the Consolidation of Authoritarian Projects

Introduction

Between 1933 and 1934, both Hitler and Vargas enacted measures to promote the centralization and enhance their control over the repressive apparatus of their respective countries. Moreover, they oversaw the establishment and reorganization of government offices dedicated to propaganda, which later became an integral part of the resources dedicated to the campaign against communism. These measures were initially conceived independently, in some cases drawing inspiration from a common source, namely Italian fascism. Nonetheless, in 1934, the initial indications of an entanglement between the authoritarian and anticommunist policies of Hitler and Vargas began to emerge.

This chapter explores the origins of this entanglement and the role of anticommunism in the rapprochement between Vargas' provisional government (1930-1934) and the Third Reich. It argues that the swift consolidation of Hitler's power in Germany, characterized by the suppression of communists and social democrats accused of orchestrating the Reichstag fire, served as a source of inspiration for the Brazilian president. In addition, it posits that this alignment provided a foundational basis for the development of a closer collaboration in the following years.

1.1. The Reichstag Fire: A Blueprint for Authoritarian Consolidation

In January 1933, as Vargas attempted to grapple with the repercussions of the conflict against the rebellious forces from the state of São Paulo, Adolf Hitler came to power in Germany. Much like Vargas, Hitler's rise to power was a product of the dire economic conditions and the political instability that plagued his country following the stock market crash of 1929. Unlike the Brazilian autocrat, however, the German dictator's ascension occurred not through a coup d'état but rather through political negotiations that engaged not only parliamentary leaders but also the German president, Paul von Hindenburg.⁷ Hitler was sworn as chancellor on January 30, 1933, securing for his National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP) two additional positions in the cabinet. Wilhelm Frick was appointed Ministry of the Interior while Herman Göring accumulated the posts of Reich's Commissioner for the Prussian Ministry of the Interior with the federal role of Minister Without Portfolio.

Through these appointments, the NSDAP sought to immediately gain control over important segments of Germany's law enforcement apparatus. Frick held the official responsibility of overseeing and coordinating Germany's security services at federal level. Yet, it was Göring who wielded the most decisive influence in mobilizing the police apparatus as part of the process that led to the consolidation of the Nazi dictatorship. Germany had until then operated under a federal governance structure wherein control over the police forces was decentralized to the states. Hence, Prussia attained significance by virtue of having the largest police contingent in the country. By appointing Göring to the Prussian Ministry of the Interior, the Nazis secured control over Prussia's

⁷ On Hitler's path to power see: Wolfgang Benz, *Geschichte des Dritten Reiches* (München: C.H.Beck, 2000), pp. 19; Richard J. Evans, *The Third Reich in Power, 1933-1939* (New York, NY: Penguin Group USA, 2005), pp. 11; and Mary Fulbrook, *History of Germany 1918-2014 4e: The Divided Nation*, 4. edition (Malden, MA Weinheim: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014), pp. 55.

police force, thus commanding the law enforcement apparatus of the largest German state whose jurisdiction included the German capital, Berlin.

Göring's initiatives as Reich Commissioner constituted one of the early steps in the process of coordination (*Gleichschaltung*) between the institutions of the NSDAP and the German state. Early on, Göring instructed the Prussian police to "maintain the best possible understanding" with "national associations (S.A., S.S. and Stahlhelm) and national parties."⁸ The term "national," as the quote illustrates, was used to imply associations and parties aligned with nationalistic and militaristic worldview spearheaded by the NSDAP, therefore excluding organizations associated with the worker's movement as well as the German Social Democratic (SPD) and Communist Parties (KPD). In a similar vein, Göring directed, "every activity for national purposes and national propaganda must be supported with all possible means."⁹ These included the "unrestrained use of firearms" against the so-called "enemies of the state," group that encompassed communists, social democrats, *Reichsbanner* members and Jews.¹⁰ Göring formalized the collaboration between the Prussian police and government-affiliated paramilitary organizations on February 22. Via decree, the Reich's Commissioner enlisted members of the SA, SS and the *Stahlhelm* into Prussia's police apparatus as an auxiliary police force (*Hilfspolizei*).¹¹ By means of Göring's decree, these

⁸ "Förderung Der Nationalen Bewegung," *Deister- Und Weserzeitung*, February 21, 1933, Zeitungsarchiv Deister- und Weserzeitung Pyrmonter Nachrichten, <https://www.archiv.dewezet.de/index2.php?id=25223&pageno=1>.

⁹ "Förderung Der Nationalen Bewegung."

¹⁰ "Göring an Die Polizei," *Vorwärts*, February 23, 1933, Historische Presse der deutschen Sozialdemokratie online, <https://fes.imageware.de/fes/web/index.html?open=VW50077&page=1>. See also: Michael Wildt, *Volksgemeinschaft Als Selbstermächtigung: Gewalt Gegen Juden in Der Deutschen Provinz 1919 Bis 1939*, (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2007), pp. 104.

¹¹ The *Stahlhelm* (Steel Helmet) was a veterans organization comprised of German soldiers who had fought in World War I. Richard Bessel, "The Nazi Capture of Power," *Journal of Contemporary History* 39, no. 2 (2004), pp. 181. See also: Benjamin Ziemann and Nadine Rossol, "Ausnahmerecht, Gewalt und Selbstgleichschaltung," bpb.de, January 20, 2023, <https://www.bpb.de/shop/zeitschriften/apuz/deutschland-1933-2023/517471/ausnahmerecht-gewalt-und-selbstgleichschaltung/>.

organizations were armed and had their violent actions sanctioned by the State, allowing them to function on par with regular Prussian police forces in the persecution of Nazi political opponents.

1.1.1. Anticommunism Takes Center Stage

Within days of Göring's decree taking effect, a fire engulfed the building of the German Parliament. The fire at the Reichstag building was reported on the evening of February 27 and shortly after the police arrested the 24-year-old communist militant Marinus van der Lubbe, accused of starting the flames. Hitler was reportedly surprised by the news of the attack but promptly recognized the political opportunity the event presented. Upon arriving at the scene, the Nazi leader remarked: "This is a God-given signal! If this fire, as I believe, turns out to be the handwork of Communists, then there is nothing that shall stop us now from crushing out this murder pest with an iron fist."¹² Hitler summoned Rudolf Diels, head of the Prussian political police, to report to the leading Nazis gathered at the scene. Diels informed his superiors that van der Lubbe was found bearing a backpack containing incendiary devices and had confessed to setting the Reichstag ablaze. According to Diels, the flammable nature of the curtains and wooden panels present at the plenary chamber of the German Parliament also gave him no reason to believe the fire was anything other than an isolated incident.¹³

Diel's report, however, was met with contempt by the Nazi leaders gathered at the balcony of the charred building. By the time he arrived, those present had firmly embraced the belief that the

¹² Sefton Delmer, London Daily Express, February 28, 1933. Cited in: "Sefton Delmer, Reporter Witnessed Hitler's Rise," *New York Times*, September 7, 1979; Fritz Tobias, *The Reichstag Fire* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1964), pp 33.

¹³ Rudolf Diels, *Lucifer Ante Portas: ... Es Spricht Der Erste Chef Der Gestapo* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1950), pp. 192-193. Also cited in: Richard J. Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2004), pp. 330.

Reichstag fire signaled the onset of a communist insurrection. Göring explicitly conveyed this belief by stating: “This is the beginning of the Communist uprising! Now they will strike out! There is not a minute to waste!”¹⁴ Hitler also dismissed the report as the product of Diel’s “childish credulity”. In the words of the Nazi leader, the attack on the Reichstag was an “ingenious, long-prepared thing.”

“These criminals have worked it out very nicely, but they have miscalculated, haven’t they, my party comrades! These sub-humans don’t suspect at all the extent to which the people are on our side. In their mouseholes, from which they now want to come out, they don’t hear anything of the rejoicing of the masses.”¹⁵

In the following days, the anticommunist panic was furthered by Nazi publications. The *Volkischer Beobachter*, the official press organ of the NSDAP, reproduced the party’s official narrative on its edition of March 1 stating that “the burning of the Reichstag was the beacon for the Bolshevik uprising.”¹⁶ The dissemination of the Nazi narrative was also assisted by the extensive coverage of the event by Germany’s conservative newspapers which relied heavily on statements by Göring and other Nazi members of Hitler’s cabinet.¹⁷ Jointly, they contributed to creating an atmosphere of terror that helped rally conservative segments of Germany’s middle and upper classes behind the persecutory measures enacted by the Nazis against individuals and organizations deemed affiliated with communism.

The heightened anticommunist fervor proved itself instrumental to Hitler. The Nazi leader exploited the commotion generated by the attack on the Reichstag to convince President

¹⁴ Diels, *Lucifer Ante Portas : ... Es Spricht Der Erste Chef Der Gestapo*. pp. 192.

¹⁵ See: Diels. pp. 193-195. Translation: Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich*. pp. 331.

¹⁶ “Der Brand Des Reichstags Sollte Das Fanal Zum Bolschewistischen Aufstand Sein,” *Volkischer Beobachter*, March 1, 1933, File R58/3199, Bundesarchiv.

¹⁷ “Regierung an Der Brandstelle,” *Vossische Zeitung*, February 28, 1933, ZEFYS; “Sozialdemokratischer Appell an Papen,” *Vossische Zeitung*, March 1, 1933, ZEFYS; “Göring Begründet Die Notverordnung,” *Vossische Zeitung*, March 2, 1933, ZEFYS.

Hindenburg to sign the Decree for the Protection of People and State, commonly referred to as the Reichstag fire decree.¹⁸ The decree restricted civil liberties, most notably the freedom of the press, allowing for the closure of oppositionist newspapers, measure that targeted publications affiliated with the German communist and social democratic parties. Moreover, it introduced harsher penalties, including death, on individuals accused of committing crimes against public buildings or authorities. Many of the measures enshrined in the Reichstag fire decree had already been acted upon at the time of its signing. The mobilization of the Prussian police against communist individuals and organizations had begun already on the night of February 27, immediately after the fire was reported. Göring's orders were to place all police in the highest state of alert and pursue the communists with full force, including the unrestrained use of firearms.¹⁹ In a matter of hours, the Prussian police detained approximately four thousand people, including the entire leadership of the KPD, accused of involvement in the alleged communist conspiracy.²⁰ Police operations extended to the offices and printing facilities of left-wing newspapers, resulting in numerous closures in the following days.²¹ It is, therefore, safe to state that the Nazis sought Hindenburg's support not out of concern for legal norms but rather to provide legitimacy *a posteriori* to the ongoing persecution of political opponents orchestrated by Hitler and Göring.

Throughout 1933, the eradication of left-wing opposition remained among the highest priorities for Hitler's regime. The authoritarian methods employed in Prussia were subsequently expanded to other states resulting, by the end of March, in the arrest of twenty thousand people across Germany believed to be associated with communist organizations. By the summer of 1933, the

¹⁸ "Verordnung Des Reichspräsidenten Zum Schutz von Volk Und Staat," *Reichsgesetzblatt I*, February 28, 1933. pp. 83.

¹⁹ Diels, *Lucifer Ante Portas : ... Es Spricht Der Erste Chef Der Gestapo*. pp. 195.

²⁰ Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich*. pp. 331.

²¹ "Sozialdemokratischer Appell an Papen," *Vossische Zeitung*, March 1, 1933, ZEFYS

number of prisoners had reached 100.000, figure that included communists, social democrats and trade unionists. These prisoners were subject to beatings, torture and, in some cases, sent to newly established concentration camps with even official reports acknowledging 600 deaths while in custody.²²

1.1.2. The Institutionalization of Nazi Propaganda

At the time of the fire at the Reichstag building, Germany was nearing the end of the campaign leading up to the elections scheduled for March 5, 1933. The Nazis had significantly increased their presence in parliament in previous elections, held respectively in July and November of 1932. However, the NSDAP fell short of securing an absolute majority in parliament leading Hitler to call for new elections soon after taking office. Amidst this backdrop, the aggressive repression of opposition parties was complemented by the deliberate use of propaganda as part of the Nazi initiatives to strengthen their grip on power. Also in this domain, communists became the primary target of Hitler's campaign, in an attempt to mobilize the anticommunist sentiment within German society through the association between communism and the attack on the Reichstag. Campaign slogans called on German voters to respond to the "red murder torchers" portraying Hitler as the sole possible savior of Germany against the "Marxist world pest."²³ The *Völkischer Beobachter* read on the eve of the election: "Build with Hitler a new Germany! Save people and state from the bloodlust of Bolshevism."²⁴

²² Evans, *The Third Reich in Power, 1933-1939*. pp. 11.

²³ Ralf Reuth, ed., *Joseph Goebbels Tagebücher*, vol. 2 (Munich: Piper Verlag, 1999), pp. 769.

²⁴ Ralf Reuth, ed., *Joseph Goebbels Tagebücher*, vol. 2 (Munich: Piper Verlag, 1999), pp. 769.

Hitler recognized the importance of propaganda early in the history of the party writing in *Mein Kampf* that “the correct use of propaganda is truly an art.”²⁵ According to the Nazi dictator: “The task of propaganda is not to educate the individual scientifically, but rather to draw the attention to certain facts, processes, necessities, etc., the significance of which is to be brought to the attention of the masses.”²⁶ The masses, in Hitler’s view, were to be the fundamental audience to which propaganda efforts should be directed. Propaganda, Hitler writes, “always has to cater to the masses. (...) The art of propaganda lies precisely in the fact that, grasping the emotional imagination of the masses, it finds its way in a psychologically correct form to the attention and further to the heart of the large masses.”²⁷

The importance of propaganda in Hitler’s worldview is further underscored by the establishment of the position of propaganda leader of the NSDAP in 1925. The new role was charged with coordinating and centralizing the party’s propaganda efforts nationwide, most notably through the publication of newspapers and pamphlets with the goal of disseminating the party’s ideology and attracting new supporters. The journalist Hermann Esser was initially appointed to the position but was soon replaced by Gregor Strasser, leader of the left-wing faction within the NSDAP. As propaganda leader, Strasser was responsible for formulating the party’s propaganda guidelines, also overseeing the resumption of publishing activities, which had been halted after the party’s ban following the failed Beer Hall Putsch of 1923.

²⁵ Adolf Hitler, *Hitler, Mein Kampf: Eine Kritische Edition*, ed. Christian Hartmann and Edith Raim, vol. 1 (München: Institut für Zeitgeschichte, 2016), pp. 185.

²⁶ Adolf Hitler, *Hitler, Mein Kampf: Eine Kritische Edition*, ed. Christian Hartmann and Edith Raim, vol. 1 (München: Institut für Zeitgeschichte, 2016), pp. 189.

²⁷ Adolf Hitler, *Hitler, Mein Kampf: Eine Kritische Edition*, ed. Christian Hartmann and Edith Raim, vol. 1 (München: Institut für Zeitgeschichte, 2016), pp. 190.

In collaboration with his brother Otto, Strasser founded in 1926 the publisher *Kampfverlag*, responsible for the publication of the weekly newspaper *Berliner Arbeiterzeitung* alongside with the regional supplements under the label “*Der nationale Sozialist*.” As managing editor of the new publishing venture, Strasser appointed the young, university-educated agitator Joseph Goebbels. Like Strasser, Goebbels espoused a worldview that intertwined German nationalism with socialist concepts, adopting in his early writings an overt anti-capitalist stance. In these writings, Goebbels evoked the notions of class struggle, proletariat and bourgeoisie to advocate for a “nationalist socialism” in which those who belonged to the nation could enjoy their share in the produce of the land and of their labor.²⁸

Despite these conceptual affinities, the Nazi propagandists reproached those who equated his ideas to those of communists and social democrats. These movements, he argued, had struggled not for the attainment of socialism, but rather for the advancement of the “murderous theories” of Marxism. True socialism, Goebbels claimed, stemmed from “natural right” of the nation to its territory. It was, therefore, incompatible with the internationalist aspirations of Marxist theorists, whom Goebbels associated with influence of the Jews.²⁹

This ambiguous relation with the ideas of Marx also informed Goebbels’ views on the revolution in Russia. During his studies, Goebbels developed a great admiration for Russian culture which translated into his political views as a belief in the messianic role of Russia as the savior of Europe against the decadence of the west. On July 30, 1924, he wrote in his diary:

“Russian men, drive the Jewish pack to hell and extend your hand to Germany. To the coming man. The key to the European question lies in Russia. How can you put your hope in England and America? What is

²⁸ Joseph Goebbels, *Der Nazi-Sozi* (Elberfeld: Verlag der Nationalsozialistischen Partei, 1932), pp. 4.

²⁹ Joseph Goebbels, *Der Nazi-Sozi* (Elberfeld: Verlag der Nationalsozialistischen Partei, 1932), pp. 4-6.

more valuable, people or money? Gentlemen diplomats, read Spengler, Dostoyevsky, and not Rathenau and the French.”³⁰

Nonetheless, Goebbels was skeptical regarding the ability of the Bolsheviks to fulfil the mission he envisioned for Russia. The Bolsheviks were portrayed in Goebbel’s early writings as corruptors of the true ideals of socialism converting themselves into an obstacle to Russia’s “national awakening”.³¹ He wrote in his diary: “Bolshevism is healthy at its core. What we see today is manger hunting, incompetence, immaturity and cowardice.”³² Goebbels further emphasized the distinction, in his mind, between the political mission of Russia and that of the Bolsheviks depicting the later as a momentary obstacle in the former’s path to greatness: “I trust Russia. Who known what good it could bring that this holy land must go through the most blatant Bolshevism.”³³

Goebbels was, therefore, disappointed when, in 1926, Hitler spoke of subjugating Russia at a conference in Bamberg. “I am stunned,” he wrote.

“What a Hitler? A reactionary? Fabulously clumsy and insecure. Russian question: completely off the mark. Italy and England natural allies. Horrible! Our task is to smash Bolshevism. Bolshevism is Jewish power! We must inherit Russia! 180 million!!! Severance pay! Law must remain law. Even for the princes. Do not touch the question of private property! (sic!) Horrible!”³⁴

Hitler personally intervened to dissuade Goebbels from his socialist inclinations. Following the conference in Bamberg, he extended an invitation to Goebbels to convene in Munich, providing an opportunity for an extended discussion on ideological matters over the course of several days.

³⁰ Reuth, *Joseph Goebbels Tagebücher*. pp. 104.

³¹ Reuth. 104.

³² Reuth. 96.

³³ Reuth. 99.

³⁴ Reuth. 228.

Through these exchanges, Hittler seemed to have left a profound impression on the mind of the young Goebbels who wrote in his diary:

“He (Hitler) spoke for 3 hours. Brilliant. (...) Italy and England our allies. Russia wants to eat us. All of this in his brochure and in the second volume of his ‘Kampf,’ which will be published soon. (sic!) We are coming together. We ask. He answers brilliantly. I love him. Social question. Completely new insights. He thought everything through.”³⁵

Goebbels’ newfound alignment with Hitler led to a confrontation with Strasser, sparking a rivalry for dominance over the publishing apparatus of the NSDAP.³⁶ This rivalry persisted until Strasser’s removal from party leadership positions in 1932. Concurrently, Goebbels’ affiliation with Hitler paved the path for his rapid rise within the ranks of the NSDAP. Under Hitler’s direction, Goebbels was appointed Gauleiter of Berlin in 1926, subsequently taking over to role of propaganda leader of the NSDAP in 1930.

At least since 1932, Hitler had plans for a cabinet that included a government office dedicated to propaganda. This was among the tasks he envisioned for the Ministry of Public Education which was to be offered to Goebbels once the Nazis had attained the chancellorship.³⁷ Hitler’s plans, however, relied on obtaining an absolute majority in the Reichstag that would allow for the formation of a Nazi-dominated cabinet. Unable to secure said majority, the Nazi leader prioritized the appointment of Frick and Göring as means to safeguard the Nazi control over Germany’s law enforcement, decision that resulted in Goebbels being overlooked in the formation of Hitler’s cabinet in January of 1933.

³⁵ Reuth. 240.

³⁶ On the foundation of Goebbels’ “Der Angriff” and disputes with Strasser see: Russel Lemmons, *Goebbels And Der Angriff* (University Press of Kentucky, 1994).

³⁷ Reuth, *Joseph Goebbels Tagebücher*. pp. 679

Despite the initial setback, Hitler was committed to the creation of a ministry dedicated to the formulation and distribution of propaganda. Albeit not having achieved the envisioned absolute majority in the election of March 1933, a coalition with the far-right German National People's Party (DNVP) enabled the Nazi leader to advance in the creation of the Ministry for Public Enlightenment and Propaganda (ProMi) on March 13, 1933.³⁸ It was not until June 1933, however, that an ordinance regulating the scope of activities of the new ministry was introduced. On that occasion, the collection of information abroad related to the arts, arts exhibitions, film and sports were reassigned from the German Foreign Office to the ProMi. The same ordinance established that Goebbels would take over from the Ministry of Interior the responsibility over Germany's cultural associations in the fields of visual arts, music, theater and the press.³⁹

Alongside the law enforcement apparatus, the ProMi played a crucial role in the process of coordination (*Gleichschaltung*) between society and the state under Nazi rule. Under Goebbels, the ProMi functioned as an instrument to promote in Germany forms of artistic expression that aligned with the ideology of the NSDAP. Above all, German art was perceived as indissociable from the hierarchical understanding of race that characterized the Nazi worldview. In established fields such as painting and music, the canons of form and beauty prevalent in 19th century Europe as well as the emphasis on folk elements and themes were interpreted by Hitler and Goebbels as the cultural materialization of the ingenuity and creativity they associated with the Aryan race. By contrast, abstract paintings and atonal music, forms of art that had flourished in the 1920s, were

³⁸ "Erlaß Über Die Errichtung des Reichsministeriums Für Volksaufklärung Und Propaganda," Reichsgesetzblatt I, March 13, 1933, pp. 104.

³⁹ "Verordnung über Die Aufgaben des Reichsministeriums Für Volksaufklärung Und Propaganda," Reichsgesetzblatt I, June 30, 1933, pp. 449.

seen as symbols of the cultural decay the Nazis attributed to the Jewish influence within German culture.⁴⁰

These aesthetic preferences, however, did not signify a complete rejection of modernity. Throughout the 1930s, the Nazi propaganda apparatus regularly employed emerging technologies and techniques for dissemination of information to larger audiences, most notably in the form of films and radio broadcasts. Goebbels was particularly invested in capitalizing the use of tools for mass communication as part of Nazi propaganda. Under his auspices, the Nazis commissioned development of the *Volksempfänger*, a series of low-cost radio receivers designed to make owning a radio more accessible to lower income families. The product was a success. Radio receivers transitioned from a luxury product in the early 1930s to an item present in 59% of German households by the end of 1938.⁴¹ The ubiquity of radio receivers and the limitations of the device, which could only tune in to German stations, facilitated the distribution of Nazi propaganda through the broadcasting of speeches from Hitler and other Nazi officials. In similar vein, Goebbels' ProMi commissioned the production of movies depicting the party rallies in Nuremberg as well as works of fiction conceived to convey Nazi ideological tenets making them accessible to increasingly larger segments of the German population. For instance, by 1943, the antisemitic

⁴⁰“Goebbels Claims Jews Will Destroy Culture,” September 1935, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum | Holocaust Encyclopedia, <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/film/goebbels-claims-jews-will-destroy-culture>; See also: Henry Grosshans, *Hitler and the Artists* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1983), 86; Benjamin G. Martin, *The Nazi-Fascist New Order for European Culture* (Harvard University Press, 2016), 21.

⁴¹Inge Marszolek and Adelheid von Saldern, “Mediale Durchdringung des Deutschen Alltags,” in *Massenmedien Im Europa Des 20. Jahrhunderts*, vol. Band 77, Industrielle Welt. Schriftenreihe Des Arbeitskreises Für Moderne Sozialgeschichte, Band 77 (Böhlau Verlag, 2010), 87, <https://doi.org/10.7788/boehlau.9783412213138.84>.

movie “Süss, the Jew” had been seen more than 20 million people.⁴² Other examples include the notorious “Triumph of the Will” and “The Eternal Jew.”

The nexus between the use of emerging technologies and more established forms of art resided in the underlying ideological component that informed the selection of works the regime chose to promote or disparage. The romanticization of war, the glorification of the German *Volk*, and the condemnation of the alleged Jewish influence in world affairs were common themes based on which the Nazi regime pursued a cultural policy with the goal of unifying “people, nation and state”⁴³

1.2. The Third Reich through the Brazilian lens

As events unfolded in Germany, the Brazilian press kept a watchful eye to the political turmoil that led to the rise to power of Adolf Hitler. Particularly in the Brazilian capital, newspapers segments dedicated to international affairs regularly updated their readers with regards to the political developments occurring in Germany offering reports and commentary on the situation and the actors involved. Prior to 1930, mentions to Hitler and the NSDAP were scant. Notes on the Nazi leader overwhelmingly portrayed him as a fringe agitator on occasion citing his oratorical abilities only to discredit his party as a “horde” of troublemakers.⁴⁴ Mentions became more frequent as the NSDAP gained electoral relevance in the early 1930s. Nonetheless, the coverage of the Nazis by Brazil’s largest newspapers remained mostly negative. The conservative *Correio da Manhã*, reporting in 1930 on the upcoming German federal elections, lamented that “the victory

⁴² Saul Friedländer, *Das Dritte Reich und die Juden: Die Jahre der Vernichtung, 1939-1945. Zweiter Band* (C.H.Beck, 2006), 126.

⁴³ Karl-Friedrich Schrieber, *Die Reichskulturkammer: Organisation und Ziele der deutschen Kulturpolitik* (Junker und Dünhaupt, 1934), 11.

⁴⁴ “O Fascismo Bávaro,” *O Jornal*, February 13, 1923, Hemeroteca Digital.

of extremist groups,” a reference to both the Nazis and the communists, appeared inevitable.⁴⁵ The trade and finance newspaper *Jornal do Commercio* was even harsher in its wording, labeling the Hitler and his party as “racists” for the eugenicist content of their program.⁴⁶

A partial change of tone occurred only in 1933, after Hitler’s appointment as chancellor of Germany. For instance, on January 31, the formation of Hitler’s cabinet was featured in the first page of *Correio da Manhã*. The article included a picture of the Nazi leader sided by Göring, Frick, Strasser and Goebbels citing a statement by the new chancellor assuring that “no extreme measures would be enacted (by Hitler’s cabinet) neither in domestic nor in foreign politics.”⁴⁷ In some passages, the article retained a slightly critical wording, for instance calling the formation of the new cabinet a “violent reactionary offensive.” Nonetheless, the adjectives that previously accompanied references to the NSDAP were no longer used, culminating in the anonymous author praising the Nazi “assault troops” for their “formidable demonstration of esteem for President Hindenburg.”⁴⁸ In the widely circulated *Jornal do Brasil*, a similar deference to Hitler’s new position as Germany’s head of government marked the coverage of his rise to power. The new cabinet was presented as a solution to the political turmoil that plagued the Weimar Republic although praise was reserved solely to the permanence of members of the previous cabinet, notably the former chancellor Franz von Papen and the minister of foreign affairs Konstantin von Neurath.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ “As Proximas Eleições Geraes Na Allemanha,” *Correio Da Manhã*, July 22, 1930, Hemeroteca Digital.

⁴⁶ “Sobre Uma Anunciada Entrevista Entre o Presidente Hindenburg e o Sr. Hitler,” *Jornal Do Commercio*, August 19, 1930, Hemeroteca Digital.

⁴⁷ “O Governo Do Reich, Afinal, Caiu Nas Mãos de Adolf Hitler,” *Correio Da Manhã*, January 31, 1933, Hemeroteca Digital.

⁴⁸ “O Governo Do Reich, Afinal, Caiu Nas Mãos de Adolf Hitler.”

⁴⁹ “Os Nazis No Governo Da Allemanha,” *Jornal Do Brasil*, January 31, 1933, Hemeroteca Digital.

Contrasting with the more established press organizations mentioned above, the recently founded and liberal-leaning *Diario de Notícias* maintained an overtly antagonistic stance towards Hitler and the Third Reich. The liberal newspaper termed the appointment of Hitler to the chancellorship as “the triumph of fascism in Germany,”⁵⁰ The article concurrently emphasized Hitler’s appointment of Göring as Prussia’s Minister for the Interior citing the contingent of 150 thousand police officers placed under his command.⁵¹ The critical tone adopted can be partially attributed to the extensive use of the US news agency United Press (UP) as a source for the article. In the United States, concerns had grown with regards to the threat posed by National Socialism to the social and political stability of the US. As early as 1924, organization of Nazi sympathizers had formed in cities like Chicago and New York which despite their modest membership had called the attention of US authorities.⁵² Concerns were enhanced further by the electoral momentum the NSDAP gained in the early 1930s. These events prompted the US Congress and law enforcement to shift their priority away from the emphasis on communism and into combating the influence of National Socialism, a shift illustrated by the establishment of the McCormack-Dickstein Committee on Un-American Activities in 1934.

At least in the early 1930s, the atmosphere of distrust in the United States with regards to the Nazis was reflected in the articles distributed by US news agencies in Brazil. These articles tended to emphasize Nazi repression against political opponents and suppression of civil liberties following Hitler’s appointment as chancellor. These included the series of articles titled “Germany under the Fascist regime,” published by the *Diario de Notícias* between February 1-3. In the first article of

⁵⁰ “Triumphou o Fascismo Na Alemanha,” *Diario de Notícias*, January 31, 1933, Hemeroteca Digital.

⁵¹ “Triumphou o Fascismo Na Alemanha,” *Diario de Notícias*, January 31, 1933, Hemeroteca Digital.

⁵² Hans Adolf Jacobsen and Arthur L. Smith, *The Nazi Party and the German Foreign Office* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 122.

the series, besides denouncing the predisposition of the Nazis to the use violence for political purposes, the article criticized the tacit support of catholic Center Party to Hitler's cabinet. Citing the United Press, the Brazilian paper reported that "it is believed that the Catholics will abstain temporarily from any opposition or even adopting any measures in the Reichstag, which equates to an absolute tolerance (to Hitler's cabinet), albeit provisional."⁵³ In similar article published on February 2, the editors reproduced UP reports of violence in the streets of Germany qualifying these occurrences as "the first consequences of the advent of fascism"⁵⁴

Divergences regarding the Brazilian press position vis-à-vis the Third Reich subsided, however, once the news about the Reichstag fire reached the country. In the morning of February 28, *Correio da Manhã* reported the incident with the headline "The seat of the German parliament set on fire – by criminal hands."⁵⁵ Citing reports from the Brazilian news agency *União Telegraphica Brasileira* (UTB), the article highlighted the discovery of more than one point of origin for the flames, proving, according to the newspapers, that the arson attack against the parliament building was a "criminal act." The article also mentioned the arrest of a "Dutch individual" suspected of perpetrating the attack although not mentioning at this point his association with communism.⁵⁶ *Jornal do Commercio* reported on the incident on the following day, citing official sources that described the incident as an "act of terrorism."⁵⁷ The business news vehicle also mentioned the identity of the perpetrator citing his affiliation with communism and reproducing the quote from

⁵³ "A Alemanha Sob o Regimen Fascista," *Diário de Notícias*, February 1, 1933.

⁵⁴ "A Alemanha Sob o Regimen Fascista," *Diário de Notícias*, February 2, 1933.

⁵⁵ "A Sede Do Parlamento Allemão Incendiada - Por Mãos Criminosas -," *Correio Da Manhã*, February 28, 1933, Hemeroteca Digital.

⁵⁶ "A Sede Do Parlamento Allemão Incendiada - Por Mãos Criminosas -."

⁵⁷ "Fogo No Palacio Do Reichstag," *Jornal Do Commercio*, March 1, 1933, Hemeroteca Digital.

Hitler made famous by British journalist Sefton Delmer: “this is a sign from heaven! (We will) exterminate with an iron fist, this scum.”⁵⁸

Perhaps more illustrative of the atmosphere of solidarity that took over the Brazilian press was the editorial by the liberal *Diario de Notícias*. Published on March 2, the article began with the authors voicing their concern with the suspension of constitutional rights and the harsher penalties imposed on political crimes by the Nazi regime. Nonetheless, the authors proceeded to praise the German “chancellor” for his commitment to the struggle against communism. Commenting on Hitler’s response to the Reichstag fire the authors stated:

“It is declared war to the death on German communism and, on this matter, we can only praise the chancellor. (...) The government announced it is not willing to use all the violent means at its disposal, but, in this case, we believe precisely the opposite. It will be required to use it, because its adversaries are invested in a formidable duel and will not allow themselves to be crushed without resistance.”⁵⁹

The article’s conclusion is even more symptomatic of the dominant understanding of the Nazi regime shared not only by Brazil’s non-communist press but also by Vargas and his cabinet.

“As long as the chancellor has to devote his efforts to the struggle against communism, until victory against it is achieved and he renders, therefore, a real service to all of the western world, similar to the one effected by Mussolini, he will not disturb the international order and will, thus, win the necessary experience in government to limit the scope of some of his bolder propositions”⁶⁰

⁵⁸ “Fogo No Palacio Do Reichstag.” 1933.

⁵⁹ “O Momento Internacional - a Dictadura Itler Na Allemanha,” *Diario de Notícias*, March 3, 1933, Hemeroteca Digital.

⁶⁰ “O Momento Internacional - a Dictadura Hitler Na Allemanha,” *Diario de Notícias*, March 3, 1933, Hemeroteca Digital.

1.2.1. Brazilian Officials and the Nazi Regime

The position of Brazilian officials vis-à-vis the NSDAP underwent a shift resembling that observed in portrayals of the Nazis in the Brazilian press. From the complete rejection in the 1920s, a mixture of deference and sympathy gained ground amidst Brazilian officials following Hitler's appointment as chancellor in 1933. That trend can be observed, for instance, among the heads of Brazil's diplomatic mission to Germany. Adalberto Guerra Duval, who besides brief interruptions held the position between 1920 and 1933, was a steadfast critic of the Nazis. During his tenure, he witnessed the birth of the party and the agitation preceding the Beer Hall Putsch, events that informed his views of Hitler and his associates. In the mid-1920s, he advised the Brazilian president Arthur Bernardes against granting a visa for Adolf Hitler to visit Brazil, a request posed by the Brazilian consul in Munich and acquaintance of the Nazi leader, Vinício da Veiga.⁶¹ In a similar vein, before leaving the post in 1933, Guerra Duval warned his superiors about Hitler's rise to power arguing that unless the main lines of the Nazi socio-political program were modified, Germany would experience "a period of grave commotions."⁶²

Contrasting with the vehement rejection of the Nazis displayed by Guerra Duval, his successor, Artur Guimarães Araújo Jorge, was less reticent towards Hitler's cabinet. In November 1933, the Brazilian diplomat submitted a confidential report to the government in Rio de Janeiro dedicated to discussing "the Jewish question in Germany."⁶³ It was not uncommon for Brazilian diplomats to submit said reports addressing issues of domestic and foreign politics as well as trade and economic affairs of the countries with which Brazil maintained diplomatic relations. Since the

⁶¹ Roberto Lopes, *Missão No Reich: Glória e Covardia Dos Diplomatas Latino-Americanos Na Alemanha de Hitler* (Rio de Janeiro, RJ, Brasil: Odisséia Editorial, 2008), pp. 72.

⁶² Adalberto Guerra Duval, "Situação Política. Organização do Novo Gabinete." (Berlin, February 9, 1933), Itamaraty.

⁶³ Artur Guimarães Araújo Jorge, "A Questão Judia Na Alemanha" (Berlin, November 6, 1933), Itamaraty.

turn of the century, Brazilian diplomatic missions abroad were advised to forward said reports to Rio de Janeiro, where they were processed and used to inform Brazilian foreign policy decisions. Prior to 1933, however, diplomatic reports on Germany were largely focused on the issues of trade and immigration, themes that dominated the German-Brazilian bilateral agenda.⁶⁴ After Hitler's rise to power, themes related to the ideology and administration of the Nazi regime began to receive greater attention.

Accompanying his report, Araújo Jorge remitted the monograph "Germany in Struggle for the Victory of Western Culture" which included a section outlining the foundations of the Nazi beliefs in the association between communism and Jewishness. Titled "the Jew as the apostle of communism" the section focused on the role of well-known communist leaders with Jewish backgrounds during the interwar revolutionary agitation in Germany and Russia. The author evoked the cases of Karl Marx, Oskar Cohn, Leon Trotsky, Kurt Eisner and Rosa Luxemburg in order to support the claim that the history of Marxism was a product of the "intellectual leadership of the Jew."⁶⁵ Well-known communist leaders with non-Jewish backgrounds were either ignored or portrayed as "semi-Jews," reflecting the Nazi belief that represented communism as a political manifestation of a racialized conception of Jewishness.

Araújo Jorge contextualized and briefly summarized some of the main arguments of the monograph in his report. The Brazilian diplomat highlighted the emphasis of the monograph on the Prussian case, replicating the data presented by the author that pointed to a 10% increase in

⁶⁴ See, for instance: Legação do Brasil em Berlim, "Acordo Comercial Com a Alemanha" (Berlin, September 6, 1931), Itamaraty; Legação do Brasil em Berlim, "Acordo Comercial Com a Alemanha" (Berlin, October 10, 1931), Itamaraty; Osvaldo Aranha, "Carta Sobre a Troca Do Carvão Alemão Por Café.," January 1932, CPDOC. See also: Stefan Rinke, "Alemanha e Brasil, 1870-1945: Uma Relação Entre Espaços," *História, Ciências, Saúde-Manguinhos* 21, no. 1 (February 17, 2014), pp. 299–316.

⁶⁵ Guimarães Araújo Jorge, 1933.

number of Jews living in Prussia between 1910 and 1925. Araújo Jorge also emphasized the apparent predilection of Jewish individuals for larger urban areas, in particular de capital Berlin. He pointed in his report to the high participation of Jews in academia and in liberal professions, data used in the Nazi monograph as evidence of the alleged “dissolving and corruptive” influence of the Jews within German society.⁶⁶

When adjectivizing the Jews, Araújo Jorge was careful to quote directly from the monograph attached to his report. His stated goal was to explain to his superiors in Brazil the ideological connection between communists and the Jews as well as the repressive measures undertaken by the Nazis against these groups in the aftermath of the Reichstag fire, occurred in February of that year. Yet, the Brazilian diplomat did not conceal his personal views on Hitler’s regime. Araújo Jorge recognized the controversial nature of Nazi antisemitism, and the violent repression directed against the Jewish population for their purported association with the communists accused of causing the Reichstag fire. Nonetheless, he portrayed the repressive measures of the Nazi Regime as belonging to a “nascent work of national reconstruction,” which was embraced by “Chancellor Adolf Hitler and the group of intellectuals and statesmen of the new generation of contemporary Germany with much courage and exalted patriotism.”⁶⁷

Within Vargas’ cabinet detractors and sympathizers of the Third Reich coexisted. Particularly within the army and related ministries, figures like Eurico Gaspar Dutra and Pedro Aurélio de Góis Monteiro, both of whom served as Ministers of War under Vargas, made public statements praising the order, discipline and hierarchy of Germany’s army and society under Hitler. They were part of the so-called Germanophile wing of Vargas’ cabinet, who, in the early 1930s, advocated a

⁶⁶ Guimarães Araújo Jorge, 1933.

⁶⁷ Guimarães Araújo Jorge, 1933.

rapprochement with the Third Reich. Conversely, Vargas' close friend and Minister of Finance, Osvaldo Aranha, was among those famously antagonistic to Hitler's regime. In a personal letter to Vargas, Aranha voiced his skepticism regarding the potential benefits of a partnership with Hitler's regime. The finance minister feared that the association with the Nazis could be perceived unfavorably by the U.S. Department of State. He suggested that Vargas should instead prioritize the alliance with the United States, a country that, by 1933, already held the position of Brazil's largest trading partner.⁶⁸

1.2.2. Vargas' Repressive Apparatus During the Provisional Government

The success of the armed insurrection that brought Vargas to power, known as the "Revolution of 1930," inaugurated the period often referred to in the Brazilian historiography as "provisional government." This period lasted between 1930 and 1934 and was marked by Vargas' attempt at consolidating, through authoritarian means, his vision for a post-oligarchic Brazil. Throughout this phase of the regime, Vargas governed by decree, concentrating on himself the powers previously exercised by the federal executive and legislative branches. Correspondingly, at the state level, Vargas directed the replacement of governors with intervenors, loyalists appointed by the Brazilian president to locally implement policies aligned with the objectives of his "revolution."

From the very outset, the concern over the spread of left-wing ideologies emerged as a prominent theme for Vargas' cabinet. On March 19, 1931, the Brazilian president introduced a decree to regulate the activities of trade unions with the goal of curbing the influence of anarchist, socialist

⁶⁸ Osvaldo Aranha, "Carta Para Getúlio Vargas Sobre as Negociações Para o Acordo Comercial Com Os EUA," November 13, 1934, CPDOC.

and communist groups among the workers.⁶⁹ The decree conditioned the legal operation of trade unions to the approval of the Ministry of Labor, Industry and Commerce effectively granting Vargas' cabinet the power to outlaw unions hostile to the regime. The decree also created the figure of the oversight delegate, appointed by the Ministry to monitor the union's activities, also introducing penalties such as fines, dismissal of the board and dissolution of the union in the event of non-compliance with the decree's provisions. These measures were accompanied by efforts to improve the operational and intelligence capabilities of the police forces across the country. For this undertaking, the Brazilian government hired two consultants from the New York Police Department, tasked with assisting in the organization of a "special service for the repression of communism."⁷⁰

1.2.3. Artists under Surveillance

The new regime also evinced a preoccupation with the use of culture and the arts as a vehicle for propagating socialist and communist ideas. By the 1930s, prominent artists associated with the Brazilian modernist movement, the main artistic current emerged in Brazil in the previous decade, had become more politicized. Their engagement with the European artistic avant-garde not only facilitated the incorporation of aesthetic elements from movements like Futurism, Cubism and Dadaism, but also exposed Brazilian modernists to the political ideas circulating in Europe at the time, most notably including fascism and communism. Among the foremost representatives of the former, writer and poet Plínio Salgado stands out, being the intellectual conceiver and founder of the fascist organization *Ação Integralista Brasileira* (Brazilian Integralist Action, AIB). As for

⁶⁹ Governo Provisório da República dos Estados Unidos do Brasil, "Decreto N° 19.770" (1931), <https://www2.camara.leg.br/legin/fed/decret/1930-1939/decreto-19770-19-marco-1931-526722-publicacaooriginal-1-pe.html>.

⁷⁰ Elizabeth Cancelli, *O Mundo Da Violência: A Polícia Da Era Vargas*, 2nd ed. (Brasília: UnB, 1994), pp. 83.

those sympathetic towards the latter, notable figures included writers Oswald de Andrade and Patrícia Galvão, as well as painters Di Cavalcanti and Tarsila do Amaral.

Founded in 1932, the AIB did not explicitly endorse Vargas' regime. The analysis of its manifesto, published in October 1932, and the preface to the novel "*O Cavaleiro de Itararé*," released the following year, both authored by Plínio Salgado, suggests a prevailing sentiment among Integralist leadership characterized by disillusionment and skepticism toward the Vargas and his cabinet. The absence of a programmatic cohesion and the willingness to compromise with allied political factions appeared as some of the criticisms the integralist leader directed at the head of the provisional government, concurrently justifying the existence of the AIB as an independent entity.⁷¹ Nevertheless, Salgado demonstrated a favorable disposition towards the authoritarian stance adopted by Vargas following the Revolution of 1930. For Salgado, Vargas' autocratic methods seemed in line with his vision of an "Integral State" which was to be based on the primacy of hierarchy, order and morality and in which the leader served as the vehicle for the expression of the national identity. Vargas and Salgado also found common cause in their opposition to communism, which both perceived as a fundamental threat to their ideological aspirations. Their mutual adherence to antiliberal and anticommunist ideals resulted in the development of a tactical alliance that endured until 1938, the year marked by the Integralists' insurrection against Vargas' autocratic *Estado Novo* regime.⁷²

⁷¹ Plínio Salgado, "Manifesto de 7 de Outubro de 1932," 1932, <https://archive.org/details/ManifestoDe7DeOutubroDe1932>; Plínio Salgado, *O Cavaleiro de Itararé* (São Paulo: Unitas, 1933). See also: Flávio Aguiar, "Salgado, o Inesperado: O Brasil Nos Quatro Romances de Plínio Salgado," *Língua e Literatura* 29 (December 6, 2009), pp. 62.

⁷² João Fabio Bertonha, *O Integralismo e sua história: memória, fontes, historiografia* (Editora Pontocom, 2016), pp. 153.

In contrast with the cordial treatment afforded to the AIB, artists labeled as sympathetic towards communism became subjects of the repressive measures carried out by Vargas' law enforcement apparatus. Particularly in larger urban centers, police officers engaged in the surveillance of the artistic scene, infiltrating arts salons and vernissages organized or attended by artists engaged or suspected of involvement with the labor movement.

Writer Patrícia Galvão was among the recurring targets of police surveillance since the onset of the provisional government. Pagu, as she was known, developed a sympathy for Marxist ideas in the years preceding Vargas' "revolution." Alongside her husband, fellow modernist writer Oswald de Andrade, she joined the Brazilian Communist Party (PCB) in 1931. That same year, the couple founded the Marxist weekly publication "*O Homem do Povo*." Pagu was an enthusiastic militant for the cause of the worker's often taking part in strikes and demonstrations where she spoke against petit-bourgeois feminism and in favor of the proletarian revolution.⁷³ In one of these occasions, a strike of longshoremen in the city of Santos in August 1931, she was arrested while making a speech, event that led to Pagu being regarded as one of the first women to be arrested for political reasons in Brazilian history.⁷⁴

Pagu's also articulated her steadfast commitment to the worker's movement in her writings. Upon her release from prison, in 1933, she completed the novel *Parque Industrial*, a work instrumental to the establishment of the genre of the proletarian novel in Brazil. The novel depicted the life of working-class women in São Paulo during the 1930s denouncing the precarious working

⁷³ Antonio Risério, "Pagu: Vida-Obra, Obravida, Vida," in *Pagu: Vida-Obra*, ed. Augusto de Campos, Edição revista e ampliada (São Paulo, Brazil: Companhia das Letras, 2014), pp. 37. See also: Sarah Pinto de Holanda, "Um Caminho de Liberdade: O Legado de Pagu" (master's thesis, Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, 2014).

⁷⁴ "Quando Ia Realizar-Se Um Comicio Comunista Em Santos Verificou-Se Sério Conflictio, Sahindo Feridos Policiaies e Operarios," *Diario de S.Paulo*, August 25, 1931, <http://memorialdademocracia.com.br/card/ato-em-memoria-de-sacco-e-vanzetti-termina-com-morte>.

conditions in the factories and the struggles affecting women in that environment. An overtly militant work, *Parque Industrial* once again drew to Pagu the attention of Brazilian authorities who labeled the book as a piece of communist propaganda.⁷⁵ The work was also poorly received within the PCB for its emphasis on the experiences of women and for discussing the themes of prostitution and sexual assault in a manner that defied the conservative morality of her male comrades.⁷⁶ Persecuted by the police and disillusioned with her party, Pagu left Brazil for the Soviet Union shortly after the publication of her novel.

Echoing Pagu's experience, painter Tarsila do Amaral was also subjected to surveillance and persecution in the early years of Vargas' regime. During that time, Tarsila was active in the artistic and intellectual circles associated with the PCB. In 1930, she began a relationship with psychiatrist and communist militant Osório César with whom she travelled to the Soviet Union the following year. The intellectual collaboration with her partner and her experience in the USSR stimulated Tarsila to address in her work the issues affecting the working-class. The paintings "*Operários*" and "*Segunda Classe*," both from 1933, as well as the artwork "*Crianças*" from 1935, are among the works that defined the so-called "social phase" of the Brazilian painter.⁷⁷ Upon returning to Brazil, Tarsila partook in gatherings of left-wing organizations addressing social issues in arts salons and exhibitions dedicated to Brazilian Modern Art. She became a prominent figure within the *Clube dos Artistas Modernos*, a left-wing artists association founded by painter Di Cavalcante,

⁷⁵ On the views of the political police regarding Pagu's political activities see: Venancio Ayres, "Report by Chief of Department of Political and Social Order against the Release of Patrícia Galvão," March 23, 1936, DEOPS-APESP.

⁷⁶ Tereza Freire, *Dos Escombros de Pagu: Um Recorte Biográfico de Patrícia Galvão* (São Paulo: Editora Senac São Paulo: Edições SESCSP, 2008), pp. 113.

⁷⁷ Aracy Amaral, *Tarsila, sua obra e seu tempo* (EdUSP, 2003), pp. 376.

significantly contributing, particularly through her speeches, to the dissemination of socialist realism in Brazil.⁷⁸

Tarsila's connections to the intellectual and artistic elites of the time led to the painter being regarded as a particularly dangerous propagandist by the Vargas regime. Agents of the Department of Political and Social Order (DEOPS), the state's political police, described Tarsila as "the greatest and boldest communist woman among all communist women."⁷⁹ According to DEOPS reports, she was able to "convert almost all those who hear her," being distinguished for "teaching theoretically and practically the red doctrine" in "noble salons" as opposed to the "covert places" preferred by her peers.⁸⁰ For her participation in "subversive meetings" and alleged connections to international communist organizations Tarsila was arrested soon after returning from her travels to the Soviet Union.⁸¹ After being released, Tarsila distanced herself from her partner and party politics. Nonetheless, she did not abandon her interest in working-class themes, which she continued to revisit throughout her life.

1.2.4. Law Enforcement Centralization and Vargas' Political Police

However, by the time Hitler came to power in Germany, Vargas was grappling with environment of political instability and challenges to his authority. In 1932, the oligarchies that had sustained Brazil's "Old-Republic" (1889-1930), particularly those in the federal state of São Paulo, rebelled against the Vargas authoritarian methods, demanding the reinstatement of the constitutional order interrupted by Vargas and his associates in 1930. Their discontent ultimately led to an armed

⁷⁸ Amaral, 2003, pp. 377.

⁷⁹ DEOPS, "Informes Reservados," July 30, 1933, DEOPS-APESP.

⁸⁰ DEOPS.

⁸¹ Amaral, 2003, pp. 404

insurrection against Vargas' provisional government, known as the "constitutionalist revolution." Although government forces emerged victorious from the conflict, Vargas was unable to appease the growing demands for the liberalization of his regime. As a response, Vargas decreed in 1933 the reopening of the Brazilian Congress, subsequently convening an assembly to draft a new constitution.

Nonetheless, Vargas had no intention of relinquishing power. In attempts to win the favor of members of the Constituent Assembly, he made significant concessions to his political opponents. These included the granting of amnesty to participants in the constitutionalist revolution and the relaxation of the censorship imposed on the press in 1933.⁸² Concomitantly, however, the Brazilian president advanced reforms aimed at extending his control over the country's law enforcement apparatus. Vargas recognized that his claim to power depended on the ability to wield the repressive capabilities of the state. The support of the army had been decisive both in the seizure of power in 1930 and in the repression of the uprising in São Paulo in 1932. Most notably, Vargas was able to harness the support of the lieutenants' movement (movimento tenentista), a group of low-ranking army officers that had led a series of mutinies against the oligarchic republic in the 1920s. As a means to retain their support, Vargas integrated some of the most prominent "lieutenants" into the administration. In federal states such as Bahia, Maranhão Pará, and Piauí officers associated with the lieutenants' movement were appointed intervenors, while a few others occupied strategic positions in the administration, some which answered directly to the Brazilian president.

⁸² Governo Provisório da República dos Estados Unidos do Brasil, "Decreto N° 24.297" (1934), <https://www2.camara.leg.br/legin/fed/decret/1930-1939/decreto-24297-28-maio-1934-507572-publicacaooriginal-1-pe.html>; Governo Provisório da República dos Estados Unidos do Brasil, "Decreto N° 24.776" (1934), https://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/decreto/1930-1949/d24776.htm.

Regarding the police forces, Vargas directed a restructuring effort aimed at reducing the influence of oppositionists in the upper echelons of law enforcement. With the collaboration of the intervenors and state commissioners (*chefe de polícia*), Vargas orchestrated the dismissal of chiefs of police (*delegado*) and deputy chiefs of police (*delegado auxiliar*), measures that most notably affected the Brazilian capital and states known for their opposition to Vargas' rule.⁸³ The Brazilian president did not alter the federalist arrangement that regulated the operations of police forces in Brazil.⁸⁴ Alternatively, Vargas leveraged his control over the state intervenors ensure the compliance with federal directives within the states.⁸⁵ In 1933, however, with the prospect of the imminent restoration of constitutional order, centralizing and strengthening federal authority over Brazil's law enforcement apparatus became a priority for the regime.

In this regard, decree no. 22.332, dated January 10, 1933, stands as a milestone in the process of consolidation of Vargas's control over the Brazilian police.⁸⁶ The decree marked the beginning of the administrative overhaul of the Civil Police of the Federal District (PCDF), responsible for the security of the Brazilian capital, which was under the jurisdiction of the federal government. As part of the reforms implemented by Vargas, the decree established the Special Police Department for Political and Social Order (Delegacia Especial de Ordem Política e Social - DESPS), an autonomous entity within the PCDF, reporting directly to the Chief of Police. The DESPS assumed the role of political police in the Brazilian capital, function previously held by the 4th Auxiliary Police Department of Rio de Janeiro. In addition, Vargas granted greater administrative autonomy

⁸³ Cancelli, 1994. 49

⁸⁴ Like in Germany, Brazilian police forces formally remained under the jurisdiction of individual federal states. See: Elizabeth Cancelli, *O Mundo Da Violência: A Polícia Da Era Vargas*, 2nd ed. (Brasília: UnB, 1994), pp. 60.

⁸⁵ Elizabeth Cancelli, *O Mundo Da Violência: A Polícia Da Era Vargas*, 2nd ed. (Brasília: UnB, 1994), pp. 60.

⁸⁶ Governo Provisório da República dos Estados Unidos do Brasil, "Decreto N° 22.332" (1933), <https://www2.camara.leg.br/legin/fed/decret/1930-1939/decreto-22332-10-janeiro-1933-501608-publicacaooriginal-1-pe.html>.

to the Chief of Police, enabling the establishment of police commissariats and the hiring of additional investigators for the DESPS, exceeding the numbers stipulated in the decree of January 1933.⁸⁷ Vargas' decree maintained the PCDF and the DESPS under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Justice and Internal Affairs. Nevertheless, the president retained the prerogative of appointing the Chief of Police. This arrangement facilitated the emergence of a direct reporting channel between the PCDF and the President. It incentivized the appointed Chief of Police to place his allegiance and report directly to Vargas, thereby circumventing the authority of the Ministry of Justice.

For the role of Chief of Police, Vargas appointed the army officer Filinto Müller. In the 1920s, Müller was a participant in the lieutenant mutinies and, like some of his comrades, embraced Vargas' oppositionist coalition in 1930. Besides their opposition to the oligarchic arrangement that marked Brazil's "Old Republic," the affinity with Vargas' authoritarian and antiliberal ideas enabled the collaboration between the lieutenants and the provisional government. As noted by scholar Maria Cecília Forjaz, the lieutenants believed in the state as the "articulator of society, the agglutinating pole capable of integrating and unifying the nation and also as an entity distanced from the particular interests of the classes," a worldview congruent with the ambitions of Vargas' provisional government.⁸⁸ Müller was no exception to this description. Throughout his tenure as Chief of Police, that lasted between 1933 and 1942, he ruthlessly persecuted political opponents, in particular the communists, and is known for arbitrarily imprisoning and torturing individuals

⁸⁷ Governo Provisório da República dos Estados Unidos do Brasil, "Decreto N° 22.332" (1933), <https://www2.camara.leg.br/legin/fed/decret/1930-1939/decreto-22332-10-janeiro-1933-501608-publicacaooriginal-1-pe.html>.

⁸⁸ Alzira Alves de Abreu, "Aliança Nacional Libertadora," in *Dicionário histórico-biográfico da Primeira República (1889 - 1930)*, ed. Alzira Alves de Abreu (Editora FGV, 2015), <https://atlas.fgv.br/verbete/5731>.

suspected of association with groups deemed subversive.⁸⁹ Therefore, Müller welcomed Vargas' initiatives directed at reducing the autonomy of federal states in themes related to the repression of political crimes. Müller himself, using the newfound autonomy granted to him by the PCDF reform of 1933, took the initiative of creating the *Press Ofício*, a daily report broadcasted nationally through the radio to provide news related to police matters and public security curated by the PCDF.⁹⁰ A year later, Vargas reinforced the legal framework that sustained the centralization of intelligence and information matters in the hands of the PCDF. Through decree no. 24.531, from July 2, 1934, Vargas created the General Directorship for Publicity, Communications and Transports, subordinated to the Chief of Police. The tasks assigned to the new directorship included the issuance of licenses for concert venues and theaters, the regulation of censorship over theatrical and public events, as well as section dedicated to the relations with the federal states.⁹¹ As in the reform of 1933, the decree did alter the jurisdiction over the police forces, which, at least formally, continued to be subordinated to the intervenors/governors of the federal states. Nevertheless, the new directorship created in 1934 functioned as a hub of operations for police forces nationwide, allowing the Müller to effectively coordinate and direct the activities of local police forces according to the interest of the federal government, a power most often wielded in the persecution of political opponents.

⁸⁹ R. S. Rose, *O homem mais perigoso do país: biografia de Filinto Müller*, 1ª edição (Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 2017), n. 74.

⁹⁰ Cancelli, 1994. 55.

⁹¹ Governo Provisório da República dos Estados Unidos do Brasil, "Decreto N° 24.531" (1934), <https://www2.camara.leg.br/legin/fed/decret/1930-1939/decreto-24531-2-julho-1934-498209-publicacaooriginal-1-pe.html>.

1.2.5. Department of Propaganda and Cultural Diffusion: A Page from the Nazi Playbook

Despite the similarities between the centralizing efforts of Vargas and Hitler, their respective projects for the instrumentalization of law enforcement developed independently. Rather than a symptom of the influence of the two regimes over one another, the resemblance in their approaches to law enforcement were largely a product of a common influence, namely that of Mussolini's secret police, the *Opera Vigilanza Repressione Antifascismo* (OVRA). In realm of propaganda, on the other hand, Vargas was heavily inspired by Goebbels' Ministry of Propaganda.

In September of 1934, Luís Simões Lopes, chief of staff to Vargas' cabinet, sent a personal letter to the Brazilian president relaying details about his travels in Europe. Although the purpose of his trip was unrelated to his duties in government, Simões Lopes did not refrain from commenting on matters he believed would be of interest to the Brazilian president. His itinerary originally included a brief 3-day stay in Berlin. However, such was his fascination with the workings of the Nazi regime that he decided to extend his stay in the German capital.

Simões Lopes was particularly intrigued by the role played by the Ministry of Propaganda within Hitler's regime. He was most impressed by the "systematic" and "methodized" propaganda that through "photography, radio, cinema and the press" ensured that "there was not, in all of Germany, a single person who did not feel daily in contact with 'Nazism' or Hitler."⁹² The Nazi campaign against communism was also discussed in the letter. According to Simões Lopes' account, approximately 12 to 13 million citizens in Germany were still sympathetic to communism.

⁹² Luís Simões Lopes, "Carta de Simões Lopes a Getúlio Vargas Sobre Sua Visita à Berlim," September 22, 1934, CPDOC.

Nonetheless society was being rapidly “nazified,” a phenomenon he believed could also be attributed to the initiatives conducted by the Goebbels’ ministry.⁹³

Alongside his letter, Lopes remitted an organogram of the Goebbels’ ProMi for the appreciation of the Brazilian president. The document outlined the scope of different departments within the ministry prefaced by a brief overview about the creation of the ProMi and its functions within Hitler’s regime. Vargas’ aide confessed not to understand the Nazi obsession with the Jews and their purported “machine for the ‘Judaization of the universe,’” however he advised the Brazilian president to establish an organization modeled after Goebbels’s ministry in Brazil.

“The organization of the Ministry of Propaganda fascinates me so much, that I allow myself to suggest the creation of a miniature of it in Brazil. Evidently, we do not have the resources to maintain an organization like the German; we neither need many of its services nor would our political and administrative organization bear it, but we could adapt the German organization, equipping the country (Brazil) with a formidable instrument for its moral and material progress.”⁹⁴

The innerworkings of Goebbels’ ministry were hardly a novelty for the Brazilian public, let alone to Vargas himself. In November 1933, all major newspapers in the Brazilian capital reported on the publication by the French newspaper “*Petit Parisien*” of confidential documents outlining the methods and goals of the ProMi with regards to the distribution of propaganda in the Americas. The Brazilian newspaper *Correio da Manhã* replicated large segments of the document which described the Americas as the new frontier for the propaganda campaign of the Third Reich.⁹⁵ Citing the document obtained by the French paper, the article referenced the ambition of Nazi leadership to “conquer in the most considerable measure the public opinion in both of the

⁹³ Simões Lopes, 1934.

⁹⁴ Simões Lopes, 1934.

⁹⁵ “O Documento Confidencial Que Se Divulga,” *Correio Da Manhã*, November 17, 1933, 6, Hemeroteca Digital.

Americas.”⁹⁶ This was to be achieved through the establishment of a radio service, complemented by a network of agents, whose affiliation with the ProMi was not to be disclosed, tasked with distributing to foreign press organizations news that portrayed Hitler’s regime in a favorable light.⁹⁷

In the following day, the publication of the second part of the document by the *Petit Parisien* appeared in the cover of the Brazilian paper. The new section discussed the use of official and unofficial news agencies noting that since Hitler’s rise to power, the use by foreign news organizations of articles distributed by the German agencies *Transocean* and *Deutscher Nachrichtendienst* decreased considerably. According to the document, Goebbels was convinced of the need to recruit agents with no apparent affiliation to the NSDAP. The Nazis also considered, the article noted, the possibility of subsidizing the distribution of news as a means to incentivize foreign news organization to use the services of German news agencies.⁹⁸

In turn, *Jornal do Brasil* took notice of the rebuttal by the propaganda minister. Nonetheless, the editors chose to emphasize the response issued by the French publication. The article mentions Goebbels’ claim that the accusations were extracted from “sparse sentences in speeches and publications dating back several years,” implying they no longer reflected the position of the party. The *Petit Parisien* denied having selected the sentences to defame the German minister and his office. Furthermore, it rejected declaration by Goebbels that accused France and the *Petit Parisien* of undermining world peace. The article concludes by denouncing “Hitler’s imperialism,” evinced in the secret documents obtained by the French newspaper, which revealed, according to the

⁹⁶ “O Documento Confidencial Que Se Divulga,” 6.

⁹⁷ “O Documento Confidencial Que Se Divulga,” 6.

⁹⁸ “As Revelações Sobre a Propaganda Alemã,” *Correio Da Manhã*, November 18, 1933, Hemeroteca Digital.

French publication, “the real thinking of the men of the Third Reich.”⁹⁹ The French publication sought to further corroborate the authenticity of its claims in another article, replicated in *Jornal do Brasil* on November 21, 1933. The article cited statements by British journalist Geoffrey Fraser, who had worked for *Transocean*. Fraser had been recently released from prison after being detained for thirty-seven days by the Nazis on suspicions of espousing communist ideas. Quoting Fraser, the article states:

“As a former writer for four years for *Transocean* services, (...) I can confirm the entirety of the document to which I add a few clarifications. Before the advent of Hitler’s regime, *Transocean*, although expressing a German point of view, sought honestly not to play the role of a propaganda agency, but to transmit credible information.”¹⁰⁰

Albeit less prominently, the activities of the ProMi within Germany were also the subject of articles in the Brazilian press. For instance, the liberal *Diario de Notícias* published a note reporting on the creation of the Reich Chamber of Culture. The article highlighted the role assumed by Goebbels, who “formally took control of the arts, music, literature, theater, cinema and radio.” The goal, the note reported, was to coin the German artist in the molds predicated by the new regime.¹⁰¹

Although reports from the Brazilian press about Goebbels’ ministry were predominantly negative, Vargas recognized the power and importance of using propaganda to preserve the of his administration. As early as 1931, he established the first government agency dedicated to the distribution of official news, the Official Department of Publicity (DOP). The scope of its activities was limited. In addition to serving as a source for articles published in the written press, the DOP occasionally produced radio broadcasts curated by the government. An agency dedicated to the

⁹⁹ “Uma Energica Resposta Do ‘Petit Parisien’ Ao Desmentido Do Sr. Goebbels,” *Jornal Do Brasil*, November 19, 1933, Hemeroteca Digital.

¹⁰⁰ “Uma Carta Do Jornalista Ingles Geoffrey Fraser,” *Jornal Do Brasil*, November 21, 1933, Hemeroteca Digital.

¹⁰¹ “Hitler Quer ‘Criar o Typo Do Artista Allemão,’” *Diario de Notícias*, November 16, 1933, Hemeroteca Digital.

production, regulation and distribution of propaganda in molds similar to those conceived by the Nazis was established only 1934. The Department of Propaganda and Cultural Diffusion (DPDC) was created through decree no. 24.651, from July 10. It was the result of the reformulation of the DOP, which expanded its administrative structure and scope of activities. The DPDC was responsible for conceiving strategies for the use of cinema and the radio as instruments of cultural diffusion, stimulating the production and distribution of educational films, performing the censorship or promotion of educational film through prizes and tax incentives, as well as directing material culture.¹⁰²

The DPDC was indeed, as Simões Lopes suggested, more modest in its structure and scope of activities when compared to its German counterpart. Vargas' propaganda department had only three sections, dedicated respectively to radio, cinema, and material culture.¹⁰³ Nonetheless, the new department incorporated the National Press, that since 1902 held the monopoly over the publication of laws, decreed, periodicals and other materials issued by federal, state or municipal governments.¹⁰⁴ Despite being subordinated to the DPDC, however, the National Press retained its organizational structure a certain degree of autonomy. The main contribution of the National Press to the workings of the DPDC was the publishing of the official publication of the new department, the *Revista Nacional de Educação*.

To head the new department Vargas appointed the journalist Lourival Fontes, who was a friend and early supporter of insurrection that brought Vargas to power. Fontes was a passionate admirer of Mussolini and cultivated close relations with the nascent Brazilian fascist movement prior to

¹⁰² Governo da República dos Estados Unidos do Brasil, "Decreto N° 24.651" (1934).

¹⁰³ Governo da República dos Estados Unidos do Brasil.

¹⁰⁴ Governo da República dos Estados Unidos do Brasil, "Decreto N° 4.680" (1902).

his appointment to the DPDC. In 1931, he established the fascist-oriented magazine *Hierarquia*. The publication counted influential individuals from the Brazilian fascist movement among its contributors, including Olbiano de Melo, Francisco de San Tiago Dantas, and Plínio Salgado. In the following year, he became a member of the Rio de Janeiro chapter of the *Sociedade de Estudos Políticos*, a precursor to the fascist-inspired political organization *Ação Integralista Brasileira* (AIB).¹⁰⁵

While Fontes' ideological leanings suggests a greater sympathy for Italian fascism, the operations and institutional composition of the organization he led drew its inspiration almost entirely from the Nazi regime. From the sections dedicated to emerging technologies of mass communication, to the use of said technologies for the systematic distribution of government curated materials, Vargas took a page directly from the Nazi playbook. The association between cinema and the radio, Vargas assured, would enable the government to employ “a cohesive system of mental, moral and hygienic education, equipping Brazil with the tools necessary for the preparation of an entrepreneurial, resilient, and vigorous people.” These were the new tools through which Vargas hoped the “population of the coast and of the countryside would learn to love Brazil.”¹⁰⁶

Concluding Remarks

The rise to power of Adolf Hitler in Germany and Getúlio Vargas in Brazil were very much a product local political dynamics. One can mention, for instance, the fact that the first, despite his popularity, was brought to power by traditional political elites, whereas the latter rebelled against

¹⁰⁵ Silvia Pantoja, “FONTES, Lourival,” in *Dicionário Histórico-Biográfico Brasileiro*, ed. Alzira Abreu (Rio de Janeiro: Fundação Getúlio Vargas, 1984), <https://cpdoc.fgv.br/acervo/dicionarios/dhbb>.

¹⁰⁶ Getúlio Vargas, *A Nova Política Do Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro: José Olympio, 1938), 188.

said elites on his way to the presidency. Also worth noting, the centrality of a biological and deterministic conception of race that defined Nazi ideology did not receive the same attention from Vargas and his cabinet as a formative element of the nation. However, the analysis of the approaches towards political opponents utilized by the regimes of Hitler and Vargas reveals a number of ideological and policy parallels that would form the basis for the development of their partnership in the following years.

First and foremost, the authoritarian nature of both regimes informed their preoccupation with exerting control over their countries' respective law enforcement apparatuses. In Brazil, as was in Germany, Vargas conducted policies aimed at limiting the autonomy previously enjoyed by federal states with regards to police matters. This was achieved by incremental legal reforms to the existing structures of the country's law enforcement and the appointment of trusted allies to strategic position within the police forces. In Brazil, these resulted the appointment of Filinto Müller as Chief of Police of the Federal District, a measure accompanied by reforms that granted the PCDF capabilities to collect and distribute information as well as the power to coordinate with the police forces in the federal states the operationalization of the repression against political opponents.

Meanwhile, in Germany, the centralizing impetus of the Nazi regime manifested in the appointment of Wilhem Frick to the Ministry of the Interior and Hermann Göring as Reich Commissioner in Prussia. The latter, in particular, played a pivotal role in the consolidation of Hitler's dictatorship as he ensured the Nazi control over the largest police contingent in Germany, whose jurisdiction included the German capital, Berlin. These measures were complemented by the incorporation to the regular police forces of paramilitary units belonging or sympathetic to the NSDAP. These included not only the SA, but also the SS and the *Stahlhelm*.

The early concern with the dissemination of communist movements and ideas in Brazil and Germany was also a congruent feature of the regimes led by Vargas and Hitler. Soon after seizing power, Vargas enacted measures to curtail the spread of communism among Brazilian workers. Among his first decrees, Vargas included the regulation of trade unions, subordinating to the will of his cabinet the ability of unions to continue operating. Brazilian artists accused of involvement with communism were also targeted. As the cases of Patrícia Galvão and Tarsila do Amaral illustrate, Vargas promoted and condoned with surveillance initiatives directed against prominent member of Brazil's artistic scene accused of promoting communist ideas. Said initiatives led, respectively, to the imprisonment of Pagú in 1931 and Tarsila in 1933.

Likewise, communists were among the first victims of persecution following Hitler's rise to the chancellorship. In the case of Germany, the arson attack against the Reichstag building served as potent catalyst, enabling a response by the Nazi regime that found no correspondence in the Brazilian case in its scale and forcefulness. However, paired with the analysis Vargas' anticommunist measures during his provisional government, Hitler's campaign against the communist in 1933 illustrates how the mobilization of anticommunist discourses was instrumentalized as a legitimizing factor by both regimes.

Needless to say, the outcomes of these early attempts at consolidating authoritarian projects were considerably different. While the Reichstag fire and the mobilization of anticommunist discourses in Germany favored the approval of the enabling act and consequently the advent of Hitler's dictatorship, in Brazil, at least initially, they did not produce enough political momentum to prevent challenges to Vargas' authority. Demands for the reestablishment of the constitutional order, forced the Brazilian president to momentarily abdicate of his dictatorial powers. Through additional

concessions to his adversaries, however, Vargas was able to remain at the helm of the federal executive for an additional term of four years, expected to end with the elections of 1938.

This setback did not prevent Vargas from emulating elements of the authoritarian regime led by Adolf Hitler. Personal documents as well as the newspaper coverage in Rio de Janeiro of the early years of the Nazi regime indicate that the Brazilian president was well-informed about the political developments unfolding in Germany. The creation of the Department of Propaganda and Cultural Diffusion (DPDC) provides further evidence for this conclusion. The DPDC not only introduced more sophisticated methods for the dissemination of propaganda, but also replicated in a scale compatible with the limited resources available to the Brazilian government the organization of Goebbels' Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda (ProMi).

In sum, the initial relationship between Hitler's and Vargas' regimes can be characterized as an emerging affinity. While conditioned by local circumstances, both regimes leveraged existing anticommunist sentiments to legitimize measures that increased federal executive control over the state's repressive apparatus. Additionally, both Hitler and Vargas sought to exploit the potential of new mass communication technologies, using propaganda to create unfavorable portrayals of Marxist-inspired ideologies while simultaneously crafting positive images of themselves and their regimes. In this context, the initial exchanges of anticommunist strategies between Hitler and Vargas become evident, as Vargas drew direct inspiration from Hitler in developing a more sophisticated propaganda apparatus. As time progressed, this one-sided appropriation evolved into a meaningful collaboration, a transition significantly influenced by the 1935 communist uprising in Brazil.

Chapter

2. The Revolution Comes to Brazil

Introduction

The communist uprisings of 1935 were a defining moment of the period of Brazilian history known as the Vargas Era (1930-1945). They epitomize the antagonism between the government of Getúlio Vargas and the Brazilian worker's movement, also standing as a turning point in the radicalization of Vargas' government that culminated in the establishment of the Estado Novo dictatorship in 1937. Vargas mostly benefitted from evoking the memory of communist uprisings in Brazil as a cautionary tale, used to mobilize existing fears of communism and justify the suppression of constitutional liberties in the name of protecting Brazil from the "red menace."¹⁰⁷

While its significance in the realm of domestic politics is uncontroversial, the relevance of the 1935 communist uprisings in Brazil's foreign affairs often remains unacknowledged. Scholarship on Brazilian diplomatic history during the interwar period occasionally references anticommunism as an element of Getúlio Vargas' diplomatic agenda. However, these works often fall short of providing a comprehensive analysis of the uprisings' broader impact on Brazil's foreign relations. Particularly in Brazil's relations with Nazi Germany, greater attention was dedicated to anticommunism in the aftermath of the 1935 uprisings in Natal, Recife and Rio de Janeiro. As the events unfolded in Brazil, German newspapers covered the story closely, reporting on the advances

¹⁰⁷ See: Rodrigo Patto Sá Motta, *Em Guarda Contra o Perigo Vermelho: O Anticomunismo No Brasil, 1917-1964*, Coleção Estudos ; História 180 (São Paulo, SP, Brasil: Editora Perspectiva : FAPESP, 2002).

of rebellious forces and praising the Vargas administration for its uncompromising stance in the struggle against the communism. Furthermore, the participation of German nationals in the preparation and execution of the uprisings in Brazil contributed to the materialization of an anticommunist collaboration between German and Brazilian authorities.

This chapter examines the immediate aftermath of the 1935 uprisings in Brazil and the nascent phase of anticommunist collaboration between Getúlio Vargas and the Third Reich. It investigates how the events of November 1935 elevated anticommunism to a prominent issue, which, alongside trade relations, became a cornerstone of the German-Brazilian bilateral agenda.

2.1. German-Brazilian relations on the Eve of Revolution

In the first half of the 1930s, issues related to trade continued to dominate the German-Brazilian bilateral agenda. Since taking power, Vargas's dedicated significant attention to mitigating the devastating effects the Great Depression had on the Brazilian economy. Falling demand for coffee beans, Brazil's largest export, had exacerbated the oversupply crisis generated by successive record harvests since 1927, resulting in a sustained reduction in the international prices of coffee throughout the 1930s.¹⁰⁸ In order to address the issue, Brazilian authorities sought not only to reduce its economic overreliance on coffee exports but also to diversify its trading partnerships reducing its dependency from the United States.¹⁰⁹

In this context, Vargas and his cabinet saw Germany's renewed interest in the acquisition of raw materials as an opportunity. Up until 1933, Germany had managed to reestablish its industrial

¹⁰⁸ Pedro Tosi and Rogério Faleiros, "O Café No Brasil: Produção e Mercado Mundial Na Primeira Metade do Século XX" (XII Congresso Brasileiro de História Econômica, Niterói, 2017), pp. 24.

¹⁰⁹ Getúlio Vargas, "Carta Para Oswaldo Aranha," October 30, 1934, CPDOC.

capacity by utilizing its existing stocks of raw materials. Nevertheless, to support the aggressive rearmament strategy upon which Hitler's plans for the recovery of the German economy were based, securing access to additional supplies of raw materials became imperative.¹¹⁰ Discussions regarding the signature of a trade agreement between Brazil and Germany began in 1934, culminating with the visit to South America of a German delegation tasked with procuring raw materials from Argentina, Brazil, and Chile.¹¹¹ However, the Brazilian government opted to delay negotiations until they could better assess how the agreement with Germany would affect the country's trade balance and relationship with the United States.¹¹²

These considerations were crucial from the Brazilian standpoint. The terms for a new agreement proposed by Germany incorporated the directives of the *Neuer Plan*, instrument devised by the president of the Reichsbank, Hjalmar Schacht, to subsidize German rearmament efforts while preventing the depletion of Germany's foreign exchange reserves.¹¹³ Under the *Neuer Plan*, new trade agreements were to be concluded bilaterally and incorporate, whenever possible, a "clearing clause," which meant that goods imported by Germany would no longer be paid in foreign currency. Instead, the amount owed would be credited in Reichsmark to special accounts (*Ausländer Sonderkonten für Inlandszahlungen*) which could be used by the foreign trading partner as credit for the purchasing of German goods.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁰ Adam Tooze, *The Wages of Destruction: The Making and Breaking of the Nazi Economy* (New York: Penguin Books, 2008), pp. 92.

¹¹¹ Schmidt-Elskop, "Telegram on the German Trade Mission to South America" (Rio de Janeiro, November 8, 1934), PAAA.

¹¹² Vargas, "Carta Para Oswaldo Aranha," October 30, 1934, CPDOC.

¹¹³ On Schacht's "Neuer Plan" see: Adam Tooze, *The Wages of Destruction: The Making and Breaking of the Nazi Economy* (New York: Penguin Books, 2008), pp. 92; Hans-Erich Volkmann, "Außenhandel Und Aufrüstung in Deutschland 1933 Bis 1939," in *Wirtschaft Und Rüstung Am Vorabend Des Zweiten Weltkrieges*, ed. Hans-Erich Volkmann and Friedrich Forstmeier (Dusseldorf: Droste, 1981), pp. 86.

¹¹⁴ On the adoption of clearing agreements see: Larry Neal, "The Economics and Finance of Bilateral Clearing Agreements: Germany, 1934-8," *The Economic History Review* 32, no. 3 (1979): 391-404.

2.1.1. The United States and Vargas' Diplomatic Pragmatism

The adoption of the “clearing clause” had the shortcoming of preventing Brazil from maintaining a trade surplus with Germany, thereby depriving the South American nation of important foreign exchange reserves that could be used for trading with other nations and stabilizing the country’s currency. Moreover, these terms expressly antagonized the push by the U.S. administration for the liberalization of international trade enshrined in the Reciprocal Trade Agreement Act. Indeed, once news about Brazilian negotiations with Germany reached the United States, U.S. officials objected the terms of the new agreement. Said objections threatened to jeopardize similar negotiations, ongoing since 1933, for a trade agreement between Brazil and the United States. It was Vargas’ belief, however, that given the retraction of the United States from international trade, Brazil could benefit from gaining access to the German market while preserving its good relations with the administration of President Franklin D. Roosevelt.¹¹⁵

In navigating the delicate task of balancing Brazil’s interests in relation to both Germany and the United States, Vargas benefitted from the peculiar international context of the mid-1930s. In the United States, the lingering memory of the U.S. participation in World War I as well as the severe impacts of the Great Depression had prompted the U.S. Congress to place a greater emphasis on domestic affairs, a shift that came at the expense of Roosevelt’s internationalist aspirations. Efforts to engage with international issues, particularly those in Europe, encountered significant resistance from members of Congress, contributing to a foreign policy that prioritized hemispheric relations, a paradigm epitomized by FDR’s Good Neighbor Policy.¹¹⁶ Based on these priorities, U.S.

¹¹⁵ Vargas, “Carta Para Oswaldo Aranha,” October 30, 1934, CPDOC.

¹¹⁶ David F. Schmitz, *The Triumph of Internationalism: Franklin D. Roosevelt and a World in Crisis, 1933-1941*, 1st ed, Issues in the History of American Foreign Relations (Washington, D.C: Potomac Books, 2007); Robert Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy, 1932-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), pp. 39.

negotiators opted not to antagonize the Brazilian position. They privately advised Brazilian representatives against pursuing a compensation agreement with Germany but ultimately did not convert the issue into an obstacle for the signature of trade agreement with the United States.¹¹⁷

The absence of a forceful opposition from the Roosevelt administration significantly mitigated the potential risks for Brazil of a rapprochement with Germany. The negotiations and subsequent signing of the trade agreement with the United States were interpreted as signals that an expansion of Brazilian trade with the Nazi regime was unlikely to incite a strong reaction from Washington. In 1936, Brazil ultimately signed a trade agreement with Germany, which adhered to the directives of the *Neuer Plan*. Nonetheless, leveraging the increased autonomy resulting from Roosevelt's commitment to a less interventionist foreign policy, Vargas began fostering the expansion of Brazil's trade with the Third Reich as early as 1934. In the following years, Brazil's trade with the Nazi regime grew consistently, culminating in Germany surpassing the United States as the largest supplier of Brazil's overall imports in 1936. The growth of Brazil's participation in Germany's overall trade was less pronounced. However, the South American nation emerged as a major cotton supplier to the Third Reich, surpassing the United States by 1938.¹¹⁸

2.1.2. German-Brazilians and the Nazi Policies for the Germans Abroad

Taking advantage of the political instability in Germany, amplified by the fire in the Reichstag building in February 1933, Hitler initiated the process of co-ordination (*Gleichshaltung*) between party, state, and society under the banner of National Socialism. In the span of few month, the Nazi

¹¹⁷ Oswaldo Aranha, "Carta para Getúlio Vargas Sobre as Negociações Para o Acordo Comercial com os EUA," November 13, 1934. CPDOC.

¹¹⁸ Ricardo Antônio Silva Seitenfus, *O Brasil de Getúlio Vargas e a Formação Dos Blocos, 1930-1942: O Processo Do Envolvimento Brasileiro na II Guerra Mundial*, Brasiliiana. Grande Formato, v. 22 (São Paulo, SP, Brasil: Companhia Editora Nacional, 1985), pp. 83-84.

dictator replaced many of the high-ranking employees of the German civil service, replacing them with party members, forced the resignation of city officials and mayors, and eliminated the autonomy of the German states, centralizing in the party and on himself the control over Germany's institutions.¹¹⁹ As part of the co-ordination effort, Hitler also integrated party offices into the decision-making apparatus of the German state a move that impacted, among other institutions, the German Foreign Office (AA).

Traditionally responsible for the formulation and execution of Germany's foreign policy, the AA was one of the few institutions that, following Hitler's rise to power, did not undergo an immediate process of Nazification. Baron Konstantin von Neurath, Minister of Foreign Affairs since 1932, remained in office under Hitler as did most of the diplomats and officials working for the AA in the years prior to Hitler's appointment as chancellor. The absence of an intervention in the AA similar to the ones in other organization of the German civil service, however, does not indicate approval by Hitler or the senior members of the NSDAP of the ministry's leadership, nor does it suggest the desire for continuity in relation to the foreign policy of previous governments. On the contrary, Hitler, influenced by figures like Ribbentrop, Göring, Goebbels and Himmler, harbored a deep distrust of career diplomats described as a "society of conspirators" accused of not truly believing in the ideals of national socialism.¹²⁰ Despite criticism directed at the AA, Hitler found little resistance within the ministry to his proposals for foreign policy. The AA's extensive network

¹¹⁹ Among other measures, Hitler exploited the Reichstag fire to pass through parliament the Enabling Act which granted him powers to enact decrees, laws, and treaties without consulting the Reichstag. Gesetz zur Behebung der Not von Volk und Reich (Ermächtigungsgesetz) (23. März 1933), *Reichsgesetzblatt*, 1933, Teil I, Nr. 25, S. 141. On the notion of *Gleichhaltung* see: Richard J. Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich* (London: Penguin, 2004), pp. 381.

¹²⁰ Hans-Adolf Jacobsen, "The Structure of Nazi Foreign Policy 1933-1945," in *The Third Reich*, ed. Christian Leitz (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), pp. 59-60.

of diplomats and international prestige also made it challenging to simply replace it with party organizations.¹²¹

As an alternative to the direct intervention in the operations of the AA, the Nazis sought to dilute the influence of diplomatic leaders in the decision-making process on issues related to foreign policy. Hitler himself centralized the formulation of general guidelines as well as some of the main decisions regarding the foreign policy of the Third Reich.¹²² However, the main threat to AA's influence came from organizations linked to the NSDAP that gradually intervened in the decision-making process on topics that were previously within the competence of AA. Among those competing for influence in the Third Reich's foreign policy were prominent party figures such as Joachim von Ribbentrop, Hitler's adviser for international affairs, and Alfred Rosenberg, an important party ideologist who had led the *Aussenpolitisches Amt* since 1933, but also a few rising members within the NSDAP such as the young Ernst Wilhelm Bohle who had worked at the *Auslandsabteilung* under Nieland. Following Nieland's removal from office, Bohle replaced him as head of the *Auslandsabteilung* and consequently as the mediator between the NSDAP and the Germans abroad.

At the time of Bohle's promotion to head of the *Auslandsabteilung*, the organization had already been promoted to *Gau* conferring to Bohle the status of *Gauleiter*, regional leadership subordinated

¹²¹ The role of the AA during the Nazi regime was recently reassessed by a commission of historians assembled by the German Foreign Office. The commission argued in their report that the AA played a more active role in the Nazi Regime than previously assumed, contributing, for instance, with the efforts that resulted in the deportation and killing of millions of Jews during the Holocaust. The commission's report can be read in: Eckart Conze et al., *Das Amt Und Die Vergangenheit: Deutsche Diplomaten Im Dritten Reich Und in Der Bundesrepublik* (München: Karl Blessing Verlag, 2010).

¹²² Gerhard L. Weinberg, *The Foreign Policy of Hitler's Germany: Starting World War II, 1937–1939* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), pp. 657

only to the national leaders (*Reichsleiter*) thus making Bohle, then 30 years old, one of the youngest high-ranking members of the NSDAP. The organization under his command, however, was in a delicate situation due to the institutional crisis that culminated in the removal of its predecessor. In order to avoid the extinction of the *Auslandsabteilung*, Bohle sought the help of Rudolf Hess, Deputy Führer and brother of Alfred Hess with whom Bohle had become acquainted during his activities under Nieland. Bohle sought to exploit Hess' personal background as an *Auslandsdeutsche* to win his support for the preservation of his office arguing that it would be better for organizations abroad to function in a disciplined manner rather than to allow them to expand without supervision.¹²³ Hess was convinced by the young Gauleiter to support the reform of the office for the Germans abroad which was placed under Bohle's control and renamed *Auslandsorganisation* (AO).

Having secured the support from Hess and the survival of the *Gau Ausland*, Bohle initiated the process of consolidation of his influence over the themes pertaining to the relationship of the Germans abroad with the NSDAP and the Third Reich. With their grip on power secure following the approval of the Enabling Act, the relation between the regime and the Germans abroad entered a new stage moving beyond the focus on the acquisition of funds for the struggle for power at home and introducing broader debates about the alignment of Germans abroad with the NSDAP and the defense of a conception of Germanness now stirred from Nazi ideology. However, while seeking to influence the foreign policy agenda on the theme of the Germans abroad, Bohle found himself under pressure from other organizations that claimed jurisdiction over issues related to Germans abroad, most notably the *Volksbund für das Deutschtum im Ausland* (VDA).

¹²³ Hess was born and lived part of his youth in Egypt. On the meeting between Hess and Bohle see: Bohle interrogation, October 26, 1945, RG238, M1270, NARA II.

Founded in 1881 as a school association (*Schulverein*), the VDA had been active since the 19th century in the establishment and maintenance of schools, kindergartens, and libraries drawing some of its prestige from distinguished members that included historians Hans Mommsen and Heinrich von Treitschke. Its aim was to support Germans abroad with the goal of “preserving Germanness and doing everything possible to keep them German or have them become German again.”¹²⁴ Still bearing the name of *Verein für das Deutschtum im Ausland*, the association underwent an expansion during the Weimar Republic reaching circa 2 million members worldwide in 1930.¹²⁵ Although escaping the process of co-ordination following the Hitler’s rise to power, the VDA sought to adapt to the needs of the new regime in order to preserve its autonomy and continue with its work with the German communities abroad. In order to signal its willingness to accommodate to the wishes of the NSDAP the VDA elected a new leader, Hans Steinacher, more conservative and sympathetic the ideas espoused by the Nazis, and changed its name to the more *völkisch*-sounding *Volksbund für das Deutschtum im Ausland*.

The lack of clarity about the sphere of competence of the AO and the VDA, however, soon became a matter of tension between the two organizations. While seeking to assure foreign governments that their activities were aimed solely at the German citizens residing abroad (*Reichsdeutsche*), the AO avoided taking decisive action to restrict its influence among ethnic Germans who were no longer German citizens (*Volksdeutsche*), a group traditionally under the sphere of influence of the VDA. Contradicting the image he sought to portray abroad, Bohle advocated domestically for the

¹²⁴ Gründungssatzung des Allgemeinen Deutschen Schulvereins (1881) in Tammo Luther, *Volkstumspolitik des Deutschen Reiches 1933-1938: Die Auslanddeutschen Im Spannungsfeld zwischen Traditionalisten und Nationalsozialisten* (Stuttgart: F. Steiner, 2004), pp. 44.

¹²⁵ Frederik Schulze, *Auswanderung Als Nationalistisches Projekt: ‚Deutschtum‘ und Kolonialdiskurse Im südlichen Brasilien (1824-1941)* (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 2016), pp. 64.

permanence of the AO's involvement in the affairs of the *Volksdeutsche* arguing that "just as the NSDAP in Germany cannot be considered an institution that assists and guides only Germans who are members of the party, the AO also cannot be considered as an institution that assists and guides only German citizens living abroad".¹²⁶ Bohle argues that the clear distinction between *Volksdeutsche* and *Reichsdeutsche* would be a source of problems for Germany's foreign affairs advocating for the official use of ambiguous terms such as *Auslandsdeutschtum* or *Deutschstämmigen* which would allow for the AO to maintain the scope of its activities unclear to foreign governments. Faced with the attempts by the AO to meddle in the affairs of the *Volksdeutsche*, Steinacher responded voicing its concerns to the leadership of the AA. For the head of the VDA, the interference of party organizations in the affairs of the *Volksdeutsche* was detrimental to Germany's foreign relations making it urgent to establish a distinction between the activities directed at the German citizens and those directed at the *Volksdeutsche*.¹²⁷

The responsibility for mediating the conflict between AO and VDA was assigned to Hess, who attempted to define the spheres of competence of each organization. According to Hess:

"The task of registering Germans abroad who have German citizenship (Reichsdeutsche) lies with the Auslandsorganisation. Any VDA intervention in this area is prohibited. The connection with Germans abroad who are foreign nationals (Volksdeutsche) is the task of the VDA. Any intervention by Auslandsorganisation in this area is prohibited."¹²⁸

¹²⁶ Letter from the AO to the AA, October 9, 1934, R60017, PAAA. See also: Hans Adolf Jacobsen and Arthur Lee Smith, *The Nazi Party and the German Foreign Office* (New York: Routledge, 2012), pp. 32; Luis Edmundo Moraes, "O Partido Nazista No Exterior: Notas Sobre a Organização Para o Exterior (Auslandsorganisation) Do NSDAP," in *Expressões Do Nazismo No Brasil: Partido, Ideias, Práticas e Reflexos*, ed. Bruno Leal and Taís Campelo Lucas (Salvador: Sagga, 2018), pp. 41-42.

¹²⁷ Letter from Steinacher to the AA, January 18, 1935, R60029, PAAA.

¹²⁸ Note from Hess to the VDA, September 17, 1934, quoted in Jürgen Müller, *Nationalsozialismus in Lateinamerika: Die Auslandsorganisation Der NSDAP in Argentinien, Brasilien, Chile Und Mexiko, 1931-1945* (Stuttgart: Heinz, 1997), pp. 59.

The absence of an effort on the part of the AO to limit its activities to the affairs of German citizens (*Reichsdeutsche*), however, not only resulted in problems with foreign governments, but also caused tensions within German communities abroad.¹²⁹ The attempts by the members of the NSDAP abroad to reproduce in their communities the process of co-ordination enacted by the Nazis in Germany resulted in an increasing hostility towards the branches of the NSDAP abroad. The entanglement between Germanness and national socialism promoted by the party's sections abroad clashed with existing iterations of Germanness resulting oftentimes in a conflictual relation between the members of the NSDAP abroad and the German communities in their surroundings.

2.1.3. The AO and the Brazilian Section of the Nazi Party

Brazil was no exception. In a letter sent to AA in 1934, Arthur Koehler, editor of the *Urwaldsbote* newspaper in Santa Catarina, expressed his dissatisfaction with the intrusion of local members of the NSDAP, linked to the AO, in the activities of the German colonies. Initially sympathetic to the rise of Nazism in Germany, Koehler upset the local members of the NSDAP by refusing to use *Urwaldsbote*, one of the most widely circulated newspapers in the region, as a platform for the spread of party propaganda. Given that his readers were mostly Brazilian, even if of German origin, Koehler did not consider it appropriate to modify his editorial line to suit the interests of a German political movement. In his letter, Koehler asks the AA to enforce the distinction established by Hess by guaranteeing the primacy of the VDA over activities aimed at the *Volksdeutsche* in Brazil.¹³⁰ Dissatisfaction with the performance of NSDAP supporters in southern Brazil was not restricted to Santa Catarina. Also, in Rio Grande do Sul, especially in the capital Porto Alegre, the

¹²⁹ Concerns regarding the emergence of Nazi-inspired organizations and the spread of Nazi propaganda abroad emerged in the Americas as early as 1934. See: U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, *House Resolution 198*, 73rd Congress, 2nd session, 1934, NARA I.

¹³⁰ Letter from Arthur Koehler, November 26, 1934, R60029, PAAA.

aggressiveness of the local supporters of the NSDAP educed the anger of the German-Brazilians towards the local group of the NSDAP. Even before Hitler's seizure of power in Germany, local party members threatened booksellers who displayed in their windows books they considered antagonized the Nazi worldview, later trying to take control of the *Verband Deutscher Vereine* (League of German Associations) events that led the local German communities, by and large sympathetic to the Hitler movement, to reject the local NSDAP organization.¹³¹

This rejection was reflected in the limited interest of ethnic Germans in Brazil in joining the ranks of the local branch of the NSDAP. In Porto Alegre, for instance, in 1933 the local group had about 120 members in a city with approximately 30,000 inhabitants of German heritage.¹³² Even during its peak in 1937, *the Landesgruppe Brasilien* managed to recruit only 2903 accounting for all Brazilian states, where an estimated 75,000 individuals of German origin resided.¹³³ However, despite having enlisted a small portion of ethnic Germans residing in Brazil, this number was sufficient to make *Landesgruppe Brasilien* the largest organized group of NSDAP abroad in absolute number of members.¹³⁴ Between 1928 and 1934, party cells emerged in cities such as Blumenau, Porto Alegre, Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, regions that also witnessed an expansion in the number of associations identified with Nazism such as the Hitler Youth (*Hitlerjugend*), the

¹³¹ Letter from the Verband Deutscher Vereine to the AA, May 12, 1933, Folder R60029(?), PAAA. Similar discourses became common among the German-Brazilians. According to an AA report from 1935, they refused to be led by non-locals (*ortsfremden*), often young *Reichsdeutsche*, with little connection to the community. *Jahrbuch 1935*, April 20, 1935, Folder R60030, PAAA.

¹³² René Ernaini Gertz, *O Fascismo No Sul Do Brasil: Germanismo, Nazismo, Integralismo* (Porto Alegre: Mercado Aberto, 1987), pp. 82.

¹³³ Statistik der AO, 1937, quoted in Taís Campelo Lucas, "O Nazismo Transnacional: Singularidades da Organização do Partido Nacional-Socialista no Brasil," in *Expressões Do Nazismo No Brasil: Partido, Ideias, Práticas e Reflexos*, ed. Bruno Leal and Taís Campelo Lucas (Salvador: Sagga, 2018), pp. 59.

¹³⁴ It is likely that the United States had a total number of Germans affiliated with Nazi-inspired organizations greater than Brazil. However, the fragmented nature of Nazi movement in the United States resulted in many these organizations remaining out of the scope of activities of the AO acting independently from the instructions coming from the NSDAP in Germany.

League of National-Socialist Women (*Nationalsozialistische Frauenschaft*) and the National Socialist Teachers' League (*Nationalsozialistische Lehrerbund*).

Among the NSDAP's main duties in Brazil were the execution of organizational activities (such as organizing weekly meetings, preparing reports for the AO, and assisting associations linked to the party such as those mentioned above), organizing festivities, promotion of trips and exchange of local party leaders (mainly to Germany) as well as propaganda activities accomplished through newspapers, radio programs, film sessions and lectures.¹³⁵ Its structure, like that of the NSDAP in Germany, was based on the *Führerprinzip* where the role of local leader was played since 1934 by Hans Henning von Cossel, party leader in São Paulo. The reporting of NSDAP in Brazil to the headquarters in Germany and the receiving of instructions and guidelines was facilitated by the German diplomatic representations in Brazil which maintained close relations with the Brazilian branch of NSDAP throughout the years in which the party was active. In Germany, Bohle's patronage by Hess proved to be decisive for the consolidation of the AO's influence on Germans abroad, exerted over *Reichsdeutsche* and *Volksdeutsche* alike. In a letter from July 1935, Hess reformed his previous decision transferring the control of matters related to the *Volksdeutsche* overseas, with the exception of the USA, to the AO de facto relegating the VDA to the status of an auxiliary organization which was later incorporated by the party on the occasion of the creation of the new party office for the affairs of the ethnic Germans, the *Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle*.¹³⁶

In Brazil, during this same period, little was done to restrict the activities of the local NSDAP. Requests for assistance from states' governments aiming to “nationalize” German communities,

¹³⁵ Ana Maria Dietrich, “Nazismo Tropical? O Partido Nazista No Brasil” (PhD Diss., Universidade de São Paulo, 2007), pp. 36-38

¹³⁶ Jürgen Müller, *Nationalsozialismus in Lateinamerika: Die Auslandsorganisation Der NSDAP in Argentinien, Brasilien, Chile Und Mexiko, 1931-1945* (Stuttgart: Heinz, 1997), pp. 61

particularly in the southern states, found little support in Vargas' cabinet, which allowed not only the party, but also German schools and associations to remain active between 1930 and 1938.¹³⁷ Vargas' lack of interest in intervening in German communities is twofold. On the one hand, the influence of eugenic ideas in the Brazilian racial debate gave the ethnic Germans a privileged position in relation to non-European ethnic communities. Figures like Oliveira Viana and Renato Kehl, who were part of Vargas government's immigration policy evaluation committee, praised the potential for racial enhancement of European immigration in southern Brazil promoting it as a model for other regions of the country.¹³⁸ On the other hand, Vargas sought to preserve the cordial relations developed with Germany and improved by the complementarity of their trade agendas following the rise of the Nazis in 1933. As revealed in a letter to his friend and then ambassador to Washington, Oswaldo Aranha, Vargas perceived the improvement of trade relations with Germany as a way to compensate for the reduction in trade with the United States, country which, in the president's view, was no longer purchasing sufficient quantities of Brazilian products.¹³⁹ Thus, imposing restrictions on the German communities was not seen by Vargas advancing Brazil's interests since it could hinder the rapprochement with Hitler's Germany.

2.2. Anticommunism and the German-language Press in Brazil

The party was not the only mean through which the Nazis spread propaganda aimed at Germans abroad. In addition to the AO, the Ministry of Propaganda (ProMi) headed by Joseph Goebbels

¹³⁷ Letter from the German Consulate in Florianopolis to the AA, October 10, 1934, Folder R60029, PAAA

¹³⁸ Jeffrey Lesser, *A Negociação da Identidade Nacional: Imigrantes, Minorias e a Luta Pela Etnicidade no Brasil* (São Paulo: Unesp, 2001), p.127. This argument is further developed in the work Vinícius Bivar, "Diplomacy and Ethnicity: Germans in Brazil (1933–1938)," in *Migrants, Refugees, and Asylum Seekers in Latin America*, ed. Raanan Rein, Stefan Rinke, and David Sheinin (Leiden: Brill, 2020), pp. 66-84.

¹³⁹ Letter from Getúlio Vargas to Oswaldo Aranha, October 30, 1934, Reference: GV c 1934.10.09/1, Centro de Pesquisa e Documentação de História Contemporânea do Brasil (CPDOC)

played an active role in the elaboration and distribution abroad of content ideologically aligned with the precepts of National Socialism. However, unlike AO, which despite its broad appeal focused its actions on the party's sections abroad, the ProMi aimed at a broader target audience composed of both foreign press vehicles and German-language newspapers published overseas.

The organization and distribution of the content were the responsibility of the *Deutsches Nachrichtenbüro* (DNB) and *Transocean* news agencies closely monitored by Department IV, responsible within the ProMi for written media vehicles.¹⁴⁰ Although under the supervision of Goebbels' ministry, there was a concern on the part of the Third Reich that the operation of these agencies remained independent in order to preserve their credibility and avoid their association with the regime. *Transocean* remained a private entity and was not formally incorporated to the ProMi after the seizure of power by Hitler. A more sophisticated solution was employed in the case of the DNB with the creation of a holding company to conceal the agency's connection with Hitler's regime.¹⁴¹ Behind the appearance of independence, however, Goebbels intervened directly in both agencies. Employees were dismissed and sympathy for the NSDAP became a main criterion for hiring new staff. At DNB, from 1935 onwards, employees had to prove that their wives were Aryan so that they could be employed at the agency.¹⁴²

Through the news agencies, Goebbels gained access to an audience that was beyond the reach of the party's propaganda. Newspapers not aligned with the NSDAP, such as the liberal *Neue*

¹⁴⁰ On the news agencies during the Nazi Regime see: Uzulis André, *Nachrichtenagenturen Im Nationalsozialismus: Propagandainstrumente und Mittel der Presselenkung* (Frankfurt am Main: P. Lang, 1995).

¹⁴¹ Transocean was founded in 1914 as a wireless news agency and was recognized as a reputable institution during the Weimar Republic. The *Deutsche Nachrichtenbüro* was created in 1933 from the merger of existing agencies *Telegraphen-Union* and *Wolfs Telegraphisches Bureau* (WTB). The latter integrated the news agencies cartel in association with Reuters and the Associated Press, connections the DNB preserved after the merger.

¹⁴² Heidi J. S. Tworek, *News from Germany: the Competition to Control World Communications, 1900-1945* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2019), pp. 187.

Deutsche Zeitung, published in Rio Grande do Sul, often reproduced articles distributed by the news agencies linked to ProMi in their sections dedicated to international themes or German politics. The apparent independence of these agencies from the German government allowed the Nazis to spread a sympathetic view of the Third Reich through newspapers, especially German-language ones published abroad, while offering a platform for detracting, albeit in a veiled way, the “enemies of the regime”. The work of the agencies was conscious to avoid sensitive themes or issues that could harm Germany’s international image. In issues like the approval of anti-Jewish legislation and the persecution of the Jews, the ProMi confined its interventions to the defense of Germany against accusation and protests against the regime’s antisemitic policies as occurred in March 1933 during a wave of protests in Rio de Janeiro against the persecution of the Jews in Germany.¹⁴³

Communism, however, was a more frequent theme in German-language publications in Brazil. Anti-communist discourses found support not only in the Brazilian government, but also in German communities in Brazil, appearing in newspapers and almanacs of various ideological inclinations, ranging from publications associated with the local section of the NSDAP to newspapers openly critical of Nazism such as the Catholic *Deutsches Volksblatt*. Nonetheless, the process of development of the anticommunist discourses in each of the German-language newspapers published in Brazil followed distinct paths. With Hitler's rise to power, the process of construction of political identities became intertwined with the different views on ethnicity espoused by the groups that comprised the ethnic German communities in Brazil as well as to the

¹⁴³ Report on the coverage by the Brazilian Press of the protests in Rio de Janeiro opposing Nazi anti-Jewish measures, April 18, 1933, Folder R78934, PAAA.

relation each of these groups developed with National Socialism factors which resulted in different iterations of anticommunist discourse.

2.2.1. Anticommunism and the Publications of the Brazilian Section of the Nazi Party

The Nazi party in Brazil had a modest origin. In its early years, the Brazilian section of the NSDAP consisted of small party cells spread across the country that operated in isolation. Initial attempts to centralize the party structure occurred only in the aftermath of the creation of the *Auslandsabteilung* in 1931 and the subsequent establishment of the first board of the NSDAP in Brazil.¹⁴⁴ The first newspapers targeted at the supporters of National Socialism in Brazil were published in the following year with the foundation of the *Deutsche Morgen*, published in São Paulo, and its counterpart in Rio Grande do Sul, the *Für's Dritte Reich*. The first, published in larger runs and with greater frequency, sought from its foundation to establish itself as an official newspaper of the Brazilian section of the NSDAP and throughout the 1930s maintained close contact with the German diplomatic representation in Brazil through which it received articles, speeches and guidance from party organizations in Germany, in particular from the AO. The latter, with more restricted circulation, consolidated itself as a local newspaper for Nazi supporters in Rio Grande do Sul. Both were, however, important means of spreading the National Socialist ideology in Brazilian soil. Later, as other groups within the German communities, the Nazis began editing their own almanac, the *Volk und Heimat*, which circulated between 1935 and 1939.

¹⁴⁴ Ana Maria Dietrich, "Nazismo Tropical? O Partido Nazista No Brasil" (PhD Diss., Universidade de São Paulo, 2007), pp. 71.

Having as its target audience member and supporters of party, the NSDAP publication in Brazil explicitly engaged with the ideas and doctrines of national socialism. Its objective, as described in the *Deutsche Morgen*, was “to clarify a worldview (Nazism) that was going to be decisive for the fate of the German Reich.”¹⁴⁵ Dominating the pages of these publications were articles on the political struggle of the party in Germany, speeches by officials of the Third Reich, as well as texts on international politics written under the prism of the ideals of Hitler's movement. Political events in Brazil had little space in the publications of the Brazilian branch of NSDAP. Mostly, the treatment of local issues was limited to extolling the party's activities in Brazil and advertising events organized by its local groups.

Communism, on the other hand, was a recurring theme. Already during the 1932 presidential campaign in Germany, communism was presented in the NSDAP newspapers in Brazil as an antithesis of Nazism and a prominent opponent of Hitler's candidacy.¹⁴⁶ In the words of NSDAP supporters in Brazil: “if National Socialism in Germany is successfully destroyed, Communism won the game, but if it comes to power, the chances of world revolution are over.”¹⁴⁷ Communism was therefore portrayed as a global threat at the same time as it constituted an obstacle to the “awakening of Germany” under the banner of National Socialism.¹⁴⁸ The discourse of Brazilian supporters echoed Hitler's view in which communism represented both a domestic and an international threat materialized respectively in the existence of the KPD and the Soviet Union. In Hitler's words, “Russia is not a state, but a worldview that is currently restricted to a territory, or

¹⁴⁵ NSDAP: National-Sozialistische Deutsche Arbeiter-Partei, April 6, 1932, *Deutsche Morgen*

¹⁴⁶ *Der Zweite Wahlgang*, April 13, 1932, *Deutsche Morgen*

¹⁴⁷ *Lüge und Verleumdung: gegen das erwachende Deutschland*, April 13, 1932, *Deutsche Morgen* (São Paulo)

¹⁴⁸ The notion of an “awakening of Germany” was also featured in the article *Mordterror über Deutschland*, April, 1932, *Für's Dritte Reich* (Porto Alegre).

rather dominates it, but which maintains sections in all other countries, that not only strive for the same revolutionary goals, but are also organizationally subordinate to the Moscow headquarters.”

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The discourse about the “red menace” underwent little change in the aftermath of Hitler’s seizure of power in Germany. In Germany as in Brazil, the protection of German society against “communist anarchy” remained central theme for the Nazi partisans alongside the narrative that places Germany as Europe’s last line of defense against the expansionist yearnings of Soviet communism.¹⁵⁰

“Six million communists had already brought one of the oldest cultural countries to the brink of the abyss, and we know today that if the red terror in Germany would have been victorious, the whole of Europe would have been flooded, and the nations would have to see Asian hordes of communists penetrate across the Rhine and North Sea to build a realm of horrors after taking possession of a country that today houses peaceful German farmers and workers, who want to earn their living in peace work with the neighboring peoples and who, together with them, uphold European civilization.”¹⁵¹

Combined with the opposition to communism as a political movement, racial anti-communism constituted a second pillar of the anti-communist discourse advocated in the publications of the Nazi party in Brazil. The association between communism and the Jews was a constant theme in the Nazi newspapers, and it was not uncommon for it to feature as a cover story in the newspapers of the Brazilian section of NSDAP. For instance, on the occasion of the protests in Brazilian cities against the anti-Semitic measures adopted by the Third Reich, *Deutsche Morgen* printed the

¹⁴⁹ Thilo Vogelsang, “Hitlers Brief an Reichenau vom 4. Dezember 1932,” *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 7 (1959), Heft 4, pp. 434.

¹⁵⁰ Hitlers Aufruf an das deutsche Volk, March 5, 1933, *Deutsche Morgen* (São Paulo)

¹⁵¹ Adolf Hitlers Rede zur ganzen Welt, October 20, 1933, *Deutsche Morgen* (São Paulo)

headline "*Racistas...*" (Racists...) on its cover. Published in response to criticism from the Brazilian press of racial theories advocated by the Nazis, the article accuses Jews of promoting the division of the German people which resulted, according to the article, from Jewish economic conceptions, in particular "socialism, falsified and disguised as science by the Jew Marx."¹⁵² For the Nazis in Brazil, "the communists are nothing but a foreign legion of Moscow Jews in our fatherland."¹⁵³

2.2.2. German News Agencies and The Neue Deutsche Zeitung

Since its foundation in the 19th century, the Neue Deutsche Zeitung devoted itself to reporting on topics relevant to German communities in southern Brazil from a liberal / secularist perspective. For this reason, news about the local events and the Brazilian political scenario divided the pages of the newspaper with articles about German politics and European events. The acquisition of articles especially on international politics, was facilitated by German diplomatic representation in Brazil, which offered German-language newspapers such as NDZ subsidies for the installation of wireless receivers and the subscription to the services of the German news agency Transocean and its local subsidiary, the *Agência Brasileira*.¹⁵⁴ The German representatives' understanding was that encouraging the presence of German news agencies in Brazil would allow interested newspapers to circumvent filters imposed by agencies such as Reuters and Havas and would

¹⁵² „Rassistas“ ..., June 23, 1933, Deutsche Morgen (São Paulo)

¹⁵³ Wer sind heute die geistigen Vertreter des Kommunismus, April 14, 1933, Deutsche Morgen (São Paulo)

¹⁵⁴ Heidi J. S. Tworek, *News from Germany: the Competition to Control World Communications, 1900-1945* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2019), pp. 211.

benefit Germany's image in the country, outcome which, according to the assessment German diplomats, justified its costs.¹⁵⁵

The subsidy scheme for Transocean activities in Brazil benefited the Nazis. With Hitler's seizure of power, the proposal to promote a positive image of Germany through the press was extended to the Nazi regime, which already in its first months received positive coverage from the NDZ. In the aftermath of the fire in the Reichstag building, the newspaper published a series of articles distributed by Transocean reproducing speeches by NSDAP leaders and echoing the regime's narrative. As in Germany, anti-communism was a central element in the coverage of the event by the NDZ, which enthusiastically welcomed Hitler's willingness to punish the communists.¹⁵⁶ In an article provided by Transocean and published by NDZ, the arrest of KPD leader Ernst Thälmann was reported in a celebratory tone. The article criticizes the distrust of other European nations in Hitler's regime and praises the draconian measures adopted by the Third Reich against the communists, reproducing in its last lines the discourse of the NSDAP that places Germany as the last bastion in the defense of Europe against communism.¹⁵⁷

In the following years, the partnership between NDZ and Transocean continued, which allowed the German news agency, converted into an instrument of propaganda by the Goebbels' ProMi, to continue promoting the Nazi ideology, albeit in an attenuated manner, beyond the members of the party. Unlike what happened with NSDAP publications in Brazil, anticommunism spread through news agencies avoided the explicit use of the antisemitic discourse typical of national socialist

¹⁵⁵ Stefan Rinke, *"Der Letzte Freie Kontinent": Deutsche Lateinamerikapolitik Im Zeichen Transnationaler Beziehungen, 1918-1933* (Stuttgart: Heinz, 1996), pp. 541; Stefan Rinke, "Alemanha e Brasil, 1870-1945: Uma Relação Entre Espaços," *História, Ciências, Saúde-Manguinhos* 21, no. 1 (2014), pp. 12.

¹⁵⁶ Hitler gegen Kommunismus, March 8, 1933, Neue Deutsche Zeitung (Porto Alegre)

¹⁵⁷ Erklärung Hitlers, March 8, 1933, Neue Deutsche Zeitung (Porto Alegre)

racial thinking, preferring the emphasis on the communist as a political enemy. This emphasis found great complementarity in the anticommunist discourse defended by the Brazilian government inspired by Vargas' nationalism, which portrayed the communists as traitors of their homeland at the service of Moscow. The association between communism and the Jews, although sporadically employed, did not gain momentum with the Brazilian public opinion, unlike what occurred in other countries in South America such as Argentina.¹⁵⁸

The expressions of anticommunist discourses in the pages of the NDZ, however, were not confined to the coverage of German politics. Communist unrest in Brazil was also the subject of articles critical of communism published by the newspaper. The topic gained particular prominence after the communist uprising of 1935 when the newspaper created a section dedicated to the coverage of the developments that followed the uprising titled "The Struggle against Communism" and published regularly between December 1935 and February 1936. This new section was dedicated to monitoring the investigations and the manhunt for the communist leaders accused of leading the movement against Vargas and the local authorities of Natal, Recife and Rio de Janeiro. The coverage utilized as sources press releases from Vargas' political police, official statements by the government as well as articles published in the Portuguese-language press often published as simple translations with little or no additions by the editorial staff of the NDZ.¹⁵⁹ As a consequence, the articles of the NDZ echoes the alarm of the Portuguese-language press, instilled by Vargas and

¹⁵⁸ Maria Luiza Tucci Carneiro, *O Anti-Semitismo Nas Américas: memória e história* (São Paulo: EDUSP, 2007), pp. 641. In Brazil, references to the association between communism and the Jews are most commonly found in publications of the Brazilian fascist organization Ação Integralista Brasileira (AIB). See: Motta Rodrigo Patto Sá, *Em Guarda Contra o Perigo Vermelho: o Anticomunismo No Brasil, 1917-1964* (São Paulo, SP, Brasil: Editora Perspectiva, 2002), pp. 57.

¹⁵⁹ Der Kampf gegen den Kommunismus, December 30, 1935, Neue Deutsche Zeitung (Porto Alegre). In a statement read by his Press Secretary, Vargas praised the collaboration of the press in dismantling the communist uprising and requested their continuous help in the fight against communism. See: Der Kampf gegen den Kommunismus, January 10, 1936, Neue Deutsche Zeitung (Porto Alegre)

his chief of police Filinto Müller, that portrayed communist leaders as emissaries of the Comintern and communism as a foreign ideology that sought to infiltrate not only in Brazil, but South America in its entirety.¹⁶⁰

The anticommunist discourse of the NDZ differs, however, from the anticommunism advocated by the Brazilian government in incorporating an ethnic dimension. The participation of Germans among the leaders of the 1935 communist uprising pressed the NDZ to reaffirm the loyalty of German-Brazilian communities to Brazil and the Brazilian government. At that time, calls to “nationalize” the ethnic communities in Brazil began to emerge within the Vargas administration claiming the unassimilated ethnic communities posed a threat to Brazil’s national security.¹⁶¹ In German communities, it was still recent for many, especially for those who were no longer German citizens, the memory of the nationalization campaigns and the xenophobic discourse of the Brazilian authorities against the Germans from the final years of the First World War. Despite the fact that the majority of Brazilian citizens of German origin identify with Brazil and as Brazilians, this previous experience resulted in the concern to reaffirm their loyalty to the Brazilian State on occasions when it was called into question.¹⁶²

2.2.3. Nazi Germany, Anticommunism, and the Riograndense Synod

Conceived as a mission of the German Evangelical Church in Brazil, the Riograndense Synod has adopted since its creation a political identity identified with German nationalism. Inspired by the Prussian discourse that portrayed Protestantism as a religious expression of the German people, the Synod incorporated the intertwining between religion and ethnicity into its political identity

¹⁶⁰ Südamerika vom Kommunismus geheilt, December 24, 1935, Neue Deutsche Zeitung (Porto Alegre)

¹⁶¹ Oswaldo Aranha to Getúlio Vargas, September 15, 1936, GV c 1936.09.15/1, CPDOC

¹⁶² Jahrbuch 1935, April 20, 1935, R60030, PAAA

and sought to reinforce the connection between the German State and the ethnic Germans of Protestant confession in Brazil.¹⁶³ This desire to preserve their Germanness and their connection with Germany meant that the renewed interest of the Third Reich in promoting German nationalism and in involving Germans abroad with the NSDAP was well received by Protestant leaders linked to the Riograndense Synod.¹⁶⁴ Furthermore, the influence of Protestant intellectuals in the formulation ideas that inspired the *völkisch* movement, which influenced both organizations, contributed to the affinity between the Synod and the NSDAP. The defense of antisemitism, anti-materialism, and anti-liberalism inspired by figures like Alfred Stoecker allowed the leaders of the Riograndense Synod to find support for their worldview in Nazi ideology, facilitating the conciliation between the Synod and Hitler's regime.

Anticommunism was also a theme in which Stoecker's ideas had a great influence on both the Riograndense Synod and the NSDAP. Already in the 19th century, Stoecker noted with concern the attraction exerted by social democrats on workers and the less affluent classes, which led him to seek a conservative alternative to deal with the social problems existing in Germany at that time with the goal of directing workers back to Christianity and the fatherland.¹⁶⁵ Stoecker integrated, throughout his political career as leader of the Christian Social Party, his opposition to social democracy with his antisemitism, spreading among his supporters the image of social democrats as an instrument of the Jews for the control of the working class. For Stoecker, the rise of the

¹⁶³ Frederick C. Luebke, *Germans in Brazil: A Comparative History of Cultural Conflict during World War I* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987), 43; Frederik Schulze, "O Discurso Protestante Sobre a Germanidade No Brasil Observações Baseadas No Periódico Der Deutsche Ansiedler 1864-1908," *Espaço Plural*, no. 19 (2008): pp. 27.

¹⁶⁴ Zum 30. Januar. Das Dritte Reich bricht an! January 27, 1935, Sonntagsblatt der Riograndenser Synode (Hamburgo Velho)

¹⁶⁵ Was wollte Alfred Stoecker? October 27, 1935, Sonntagsblatt der Riograndenser Synode (Hamburgo Velho). See also: Harold M. Green, "Adolf Stoecker: Portrait of a Demagogue," *Politics & Policy* 31, no. 1 (2003): pp. 109.

materialistic spirit and the apostasy of the Christian faith were closely related to the increase of Jewish influence on the press and public opinion, ideas endorsed by the Sunday newspaper of the Riograndense Synod, the *Sonntagsblatt der Riograndenser Synode* (SRS).¹⁶⁶

As opposed to the NDZ, which sought to preserve its image as an independent newspaper, the SRS did not conceal its sympathy for the Third Reich. The complementarity of the Riograndense Synod's worldview with the NSDAP ideology resulted in the similarity between the Synod's discourse and that of the party making the SRS resemble on several occasions the newspapers of the Brazilian section of the NSDAP. Although less frequent than in party publications, the SRS incorporated the antisemitic vocabulary and offered support for the anti-Jewish measures enacted by the Nazi regime often highlighting the connection between the Jews and Marxism.¹⁶⁷ Hitler's rise to power was presented as the resumption of ideas identified with the *Kaiserreich* whose overthrow in 1918 was portrayed as a result of the “social-democratic and communist contamination” identified with the Weimar Republic.¹⁶⁸ Moreover, the Soviet Union appears again on the one hand as a cautionary tale and, on the other, as a materialization of the communist threat, with Germany assuming the role of the last frontier against the spread of communism over Europe.¹⁶⁹

Like the NDZ, however, many of the readers of the SRS were Brazilian nationals who also had an interest in the in the political themes related to Brazil and the Vargas government. With news about

¹⁶⁶ Was wollte Alfred Stoecker? October 27, 1935, *Sonntagsblatt der Riograndenser Synode* (Hamburgo Velho)

¹⁶⁷ *Aus Welt und Zeit: Brasilien*, January 26, 1936, *Sonntagsblatt der Riograndenser Synode* (Hamburgo Velho); *Aus Welt und Zeit Brasilien: Brasilien*, February 28, 1937, *Sonntagsblatt der Riograndenser Synode* (Hamburgo Velho).

¹⁶⁸ Zum 30. Januar. Das Dritte Reich bricht an! January 27, 1935, *Sonntagsblatt der Riograndenser Synode* (Hamburgo Velho)

¹⁶⁹ *Aus Welt und Zeit*, March 29, 1936, *Sonntagsblatt der Riograndenser Synode* (Hamburgo Velho). Hitler über den Kommunismus, April 26, 1936, *Sonntagsblatt der Riograndenser Synode* (Hamburgo Velho).

the tightening of Brazilian legislation against communism and the possible return of Prestes to Brazil, the struggle against communism, which was most commonly featured in the articles about Germany, became a matter of interest also for the coverage of Brazilian politics.¹⁷⁰ Like other local newspapers, the coverage of the events in Rio de Janeiro relied on the Portuguese-language press largely sympathetic to Vargas' harsh stance against communist agitation. The newspapers editorial position appears on editorial notes that accompanied some of the articles translated and reproduced by the SRS often praising the Brazilian government and amplifying its anticommunist vocabulary which described the struggle against the "antisocial activities" of the communists as a 'patriotic task' of the Brazilian government and its people.¹⁷¹

Nonetheless, the specificity of the SRS, in relation to the publications cited above, lies in the emphasis given by the newspaper to the anticommunist discourse of Christian inspiration. Once more, the ideas of Alfred Stoecker became relevant by advocating the ubiquity of Christian ethics as a guiding element of the ideas and social practices of Protestant communities. For Stoecker, the fight against the "enemies of the people" was among the most sacred tasks of the German Protestant confession. In this sense, the communist's "idolatrous behavior" in superimposing class consciousness on the common good was seen as the antithesis of "true socialism," as advocated by Stoecker, understood as the "liberation from selfishness and concern for well-being, general".¹⁷² The image of communism as an antithesis to Christianity was reinforced by the presentation of the Russian Revolution as a movement that aimed to replace religion with socialism. In a long article

¹⁷⁰ Aus Welt und Zeit: Brasilien, February 17, 1935, *Sonntagsblatt der Riograndenser Synode* (Hamburgo Velho). Note on Prestes' election as leader of the communists in Brazil, February 24, 1935, *Sonntagsblatt der Riograndenser Synode* (Hamburgo Velho).

¹⁷¹ Aus Welt und Zeit: Brasilien, December 15, 1935, *Sonntagsblatt der Riograndenser Synode* (Hamburgo Velho).

¹⁷² Was wollte Alfred Stoecker? October 27, 1935, *Sonntagsblatt der Riograndenser Synode* (Hamburgo Velho).

dedicated to the theme, the Soviet Union is presented as a “Godless land”, where the churches were confiscated and dilapidated, and where God had been “thrown in the dirt”.¹⁷³ The fight against communism is equated with the fight against the antichrist, for which the faithful should be prepared not only to defend their faith but also the fatherland from the impending fight.

2.2.4. Catholics and the Deutsches Volksblatt

Religious-based anti-communism was also central to Catholic leaders within German communities, particularly in southern Brazil. As the Protestants, Catholics also denounced the atheist ideals of the Russian Revolution, drawing attention to the criminalization of religion and the desecration of churches converted into “Godless museums”.¹⁷⁴ The Soviet Union was portrayed as the “first purely anti-religious country in the world” and Stalin's cult of personality was pejoratively compared to that devoted to French king Louis XIV.¹⁷⁵ Such ideas were mainly disseminated through the Catholic newspaper *Deutsches Volksblatt* published since 1871 in the city of São Leopoldo, near the capital of Rio Grande do Sul, Porto Alegre. Founded by Jesuits, the newspaper was bought by the Metzler family in 1893 becoming in the first decades of the 20th century one of the most widely read German-language newspapers in the region.¹⁷⁶ Closed in 1939 by the nationalization campaign of the Vargas dictatorship, the newspaper remained faithful throughout its existence to the German episcopate and to the Vatican acting as a promoter of

¹⁷³ Die Gottlosigkeit als Ziel, January 16, 1938, Sonntagsblatt der Riograndenser Synode (Hamburgo Velho).

¹⁷⁴ Wie Sowjetrußland Gott verhöhnt, February 27, 1935, Deutsches Volksblatt (São Leopoldo)

¹⁷⁵ Skizzen aus dem Reich der Gottlosen, May 5, 1937, Deutsches Volksblatt (São Leopoldo)

¹⁷⁶ Kate Fabiani Rigo, *Conflitos e Identidades: a ação Marista Nos núcleos Teutos Do Rio Grande Do Sul* (Porto Alegre: EDIPUCRS, 2007), pp. 27.

Germanness without, however, neglecting the civic duties of its readers as Brazilian citizens and defenders of Catholic values.¹⁷⁷

The *Volksblatt* distinguishes itself, however, from its Protestant counterpart by not incorporating in such an incisive manner the association between religion and ethnicity. The impacts of the conflict between Catholics and Protestants in Germany during the *Kulturkampf*, later transposed to Brazil, ensued the estrangement between the ethnic Germans of Catholic confession in their relation to the German State preserved throughout the first decades of the 20th century. Unlike the SRS, the discourse of the *Volksblatt* establishes a symbolic distinction where the defense of the preservation of Germanness was not to be confused with the defense of the preservation of the connection with the German State. With the rise of National Socialism, this distinction is incorporated into the Catholic discourse that prefers to distance itself from Hitler's regime and build a Germanness compatible with Brazilian citizenship.¹⁷⁸

In addition to defending the Catholic faith, the *Volksblatt* also engaged in the defense of the German-Brazilians against the interference of local NSDAP organizations as well as against the criticisms by Brazil's press and government who pointed to the association of German communities with Nazism. Occasions such as the victory of Integralist candidates in the municipal elections in Santa Catarina in 1936 were presented by the Brazilian press as evidence of the sympathy of the German communities for fascism. The "victory of Sigma" was portrayed as a "victory of the Swastika".¹⁷⁹ The association between Germans abroad and Nazism, reinforced by

¹⁷⁷ Frederik Schulze, "Regimes de Migração No Brasil e Na Alemanha: Uma Comparação Sincrônica," *Licencia&Acturas* 5, no. 2 (2017), pp. 13.

¹⁷⁸ Die Auslandsdeutschen und die Auslandsgruppen der NSDAP, February 19, 1936, *Deutsches Volksblatt* (São Leopoldo)

¹⁷⁹ Hakenkreuz oder Sigma, April 22, 1936, *Deutsches Volksblatt* (São Leopoldo)

statements by the head of the AO, was rejected by Catholics who saw in Bohle's speech the defense of the interests of the *Reichsdeutsche* to the detriment of the good relationship of German communities with the Brazilian government and society.¹⁸⁰ The newspaper describes the existence of AO and the presence of local NSDAP groups in Brazil as "extremely active and undesirable" holding these organizations responsible for the atmosphere of distrust to which German communities in Brazil were subjected.¹⁸¹

As a result of the distance between Catholic leaders of German origin in Brazil and the Third Reich, the anticommunism advocated in the pages of the *Volksblatt* did not incorporate the characteristic elements of the NSDAP's discourses about communism, namely the *völkisch*-inspired nationalism and antisemitism. On the contrary, Catholic anticommunism incorporated a universalist guise, associating the defense of Catholicism with the criticism of the derogatory representations by the Soviets of symbols of Judaism and Islam, building the image of Communism as an enemy not only of Catholicism, but of God and religion.¹⁸² The religious character of the struggle against communism takes precedence over political or ethnic considerations, distinguishing Catholic discourse from that defended by Protestants, which privileges the intertwining of religion, politics, and ethnicity. For Catholic ethnic Germans in Brazil, guided by the Vatican through the German Episcopate, it is not up to the Christian to combat communism by military means. Its main weapon against the expansion of Bolshevism is the

¹⁸⁰ Die Auslandsdeutschen und die Auslandsgruppen der NSDAP, February 19, 1936, Deutsches Volksblatt (São Leopoldo)

¹⁸¹ Hakenkreuz oder Sigma, April 22, 1936, Deutsches Volksblatt (São Leopoldo)

¹⁸² Wie Sowjetrußland Gott verhöhnt, February 27, 1935, Deutsches Volksblatt (São Leopoldo)

“word”, that is, his ability to oppose communism through a discourse based on the Catholic doctrine.¹⁸³

A fundamental element in the anticommunist discourse of the interwar period, the Soviet Union also appears on the *Volksblatt* as the concrete representation of the abstract notion of the communist threat. However, in addition to Moscow's involvement in the Brazilian uprising and the civil war in Spain, references to the USSR appear on the *Volksblatt* as cautionary narratives against Soviet social practices considered reprehensible by the Catholic Church. Once again, the religious issue appears as a central theme of Catholic anticommunism. Atheism and anti-religious propaganda appear as ailments of Soviet society often described as “Godless” in the pages of the *Volksblatt*.¹⁸⁴ Materialism and the elevation of ideology above religion are portrayed as symptoms derived from communism disseminated through anti-religious cultural practices and propaganda.¹⁸⁵ Soviet morality is presented as corrupted by the absence of God resulting from the “Godless education” given to children and the military, elements that together with religious persecution, formed the Catholic imaginary about Soviet society as depicted by the *Volksblatt*.¹⁸⁶

Despite occasional references to the anticommunist vocabulary used by the Third Reich, the analysis of the Catholic anti-communist discourse as conveyed in the *Volksblatt* demonstrates that its inspiration emerges not from the NSDAP but from the Catholic anticommunism that since the 19th century has guided the position of Catholic leaders in their preaching against communism.

¹⁸³ Das deutsche Episkopat über die Abwehr des Kommunismus, February 24, 1937, Deutsches Volksblatt (São Leopoldo)

¹⁸⁴ See among others: Wie Sowjetrußland Gott verhöhnt, February 27, 1935, Deutsches Volksblatt (São Leopoldo); Das deutsche Episkopat über die Abwehr des Kommunismus, February 24, 1937, Deutsches Volksblatt (São Leopoldo); Skizzen aus dem Reich der Gottlosen, May 5, 1937, Deutsches Volksblatt (São Leopoldo).

¹⁸⁵ Wie Sowjetrußland Gott verhöhnt, February 27, 1935, Deutsches Volksblatt (São Leopoldo)

¹⁸⁶ Skizzen aus dem Reich der Gottlosen, May 5, 1937, Deutsches Volksblatt (São Leopoldo).

The *Volksblatt*, however, adopts an approach that combined the anticommunism inspired by Catholic doctrines with universalist claims by referencing other religions, namely Judaism and Islam, and adopting a non-restrictive vocabulary opting to describe Soviet propaganda as anti-religious and not simply anti-Catholic or anti-Christian.

2.3. 1935: The Fateful Year

While on the international stage, Vargas seemed to make strides towards diversifying Brazil's portfolio of commercial partners, domestically, the Brazilian president grappled with a politically challenging environment. Amidst the president's focus on shaping the new constitutional order and on his own political survival, the workers movement and the campaign against fascism gained momentum. In 1934, strikes sprung across the country in states like Rio de Janeiro, Pará and Rio Grande do Norte, whereas, in the streets of São Paulo, antifascist militants and members of the AIB engaged in violent clashes that resulted in seven deaths.¹⁸⁷ In response to the unrest, in 1935, Vargas' cabinet presented to the Brazilian Congress the proposal for a National Security Law.

Contemptuously nicknamed “the Monster Law” by its opponents, the legislation proposed by Vargas' Justice Minister, Vicente Rao, defined what were to be considered “crimes against the social and political order.” Some of its provisions reversed individual liberties enshrined in the recently promulgated Constitution of 1934. These included restrictions to the freedom of association of civil servants and army officers, as well as limitations on the right to print, display or sell books, pamphlet and other materials considered to incite hostility towards federal, state or

¹⁸⁷ Boris Fausto, *História Do Brasil*, (São Paulo, SP, Brasil: Edusp, 1994), 358. On the clashed between antifascists and integralistas see: Fulvio Abramo, *A Revoada Dos Galinhas Verdes: Uma História Da Luta Contra o Fascismo No Brasil*, Baderna (São Paulo: Veneta, 2014).

municipal authorities.¹⁸⁸ In addition, segments of the law were devised specifically to target the workers' movement. Chapter II of the "Monter Law," for instance, defined as crimes against the social order the "incitement of hatred between social classes" and the "instigation of social classes to fight (for their causes) through violence." Other provisions included the right to close trade unions and professional associations, revoke the citizenship of naturalized individuals, and remove from their positions civil servants accused of acting against the national interest.¹⁸⁹

2.3.1. Luís Carlos Prestes and The National Liberation Alliance (ANL)

Discussions surrounding the National Security Law coincided with a moment in which calls for the formation of a united front against Vargas were gaining traction. Communists, socialists, anarchists as well as army officers affiliated with the left-wing camp of the "lieutenants" movement increasingly found common ground in their opposition to Vargas' rapprochement with fascist groupings and reconciliation with the oligarchic forces he had removed from power in 1930. Informed by these grievances, a small group of intellectuals and military officers proposed, in October 1934, the establishment of the anti-imperialist and anti-fascist organization, the National Liberation Alliance (ANL).

Its first manifesto was read to the Brazilian Congress in January 1935. On that occasion congressman Abguar Bastos and leaders of the movement rejected claims that portrayed the ANL as a political party. Instead, they described the ANL as "an ample popular movement, born of the necessity of Brazilians to emancipate themselves economically from the foreign yoke and to free themselves from the Monster Law, already being voted in parliament."¹⁹⁰ Its program, released a

¹⁸⁸ Presidente da República dos Estados Unidos do Brasil, "Lei N° 38" (1935).

¹⁸⁹ Presidente da República dos Estados Unidos do Brasil.

¹⁹⁰ Abreu, "Aliança Nacional Libertadora."

month later, argued, among other issues, for the cancelation of Brazil's foreign debt, the nationalization of foreign companies, the expropriation of large landowners, and the abolition of land leasing taxes for small properties.¹⁹¹

Its unifying discourse and broad appeal among critics of Vargas ensured the rapid growth of the movement in the first months of 1935. Although the exact number of members is unknown, sections of the ANL were created in several states, attracting students, factory workers, trade unionists, and antifascist militants to its cause.¹⁹² In Brazilian capital, Rio de Janeiro, around 10.000 workers attended the public event that launched the ANL organized on March 30. On that occasion, speakers introduced and discussed the program publicized in February and by the end of the event proclaimed the army captain Luis Carlos Prestes as the president of honor of the organization.

By 1935, Prestes had become an unescapable reference to the Brazilian labor movement. Prestes rose to prominence in the mid-1920s as one of the leaders of the *Coluna Miguel Costa-Prestes*, an armed insurrection that opposed the oligarchic government of Arthur Bernardes. Between 1925 and 1927, Prestes and his troops marched across Brazil, advocating the overthrow of Bernardes and promoting a political agenda that included the adoption of the secret ballot, the combating of corruption and electoral fraud, as well as the freedoms of conscience and the press.¹⁹³ The *Coluna* did not succeed in achieving these objectives, nonetheless, the inability of government authorities to suppress the movement helped consolidate Prestes' reputation as a military leader and a defender

¹⁹¹ "Manifesto Da Aliança Nacional Libertadora (1935)," *Revista InSURgência* 5, no. 2 (2019): 232–37, <https://periodicos.unb.br/index.php/insurgencia/article/download/29690/25272/65629>.

¹⁹² Some authors speculate the organization had between 70 and 100 thousand members by July 1935. See: Abreu, "Aliança Nacional Libertadora."

¹⁹³ Anita Leocádia Prestes, *A Coluna Prestes*, 2nd ed., Coleção Tudo é história (São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1991), 402.

of the people against a government that many believed to represent solely the interests of regional elites, image that garnered Prestes the moniker “the Knight of Hope.”¹⁹⁴

With the disbanding of the *Coluna*, Prestes and most of his men sought exile in Bolivia. It was during this period that he had his first contacts with Marxist literature provided by Brazilian journalist Rafael Correia de Oliveira, who visited Prestes in 1927.¹⁹⁵ Astrojildo Pereira, secretary-general of the Brazilian Communist Party (PCB), also visited Prestes later that year. Recounting their meeting, Prestes noted:

“We spent two days and two nights with our hammocks mounted, side by side (...) I asked him many questions, because I was very curious to know what communism was, how was the life in the Soviet Union. (...) He wanted to talk to me, present the views of the party, and he did.”¹⁹⁶

Prestes left Bolivia for Argentina a few months after the meeting with Pereira. There, he continued his studies of the writings of Marx and Lenin also establishing contacts with leading figures of the Communist Party of Argentina.¹⁹⁷ During this period, Prestes’ political convictions increasingly diverged from those that had initially motivated the “lieutenants” insurrection, aligning more closely to Marxism-Leninism and the advocacy for a popular revolution. As the elections scheduled for 1930 approached, many of his fellow “lieutenants” aligned themselves with Vargas’ Liberal Alliance, motivated by their opposition to the prevailing oligarchic regime in Brazil. Prestes, however, repeatedly rebuffed efforts by the Liberal Alliance to persuade him to join the movement. In Prestes’ words, “Siqueira (Campos) and I immediately voiced our opposition (to

¹⁹⁴ “Um ‘Herói Da Legalidade’ Como Tantos Outros,” *A Esquerda*, March 24, 1928, Hemeroteca Digital.

¹⁹⁵ Prestes, *Luiz Carlos Prestes*, chap. IV.

¹⁹⁶ Luis Carlos Prestes, *Private Tapes*, in Prestes, chap. IV.

¹⁹⁷ Prestes, chap. IV.

aligning with Vargas). We couldn't support a man who was from the dictatorship, from that oligarchy that had persecuted us, who had always been reactionary.”¹⁹⁸

Prestes would still move to Montevideo before, in 1931, heading to the Soviet Union. His allegiance to Marxism and connections within the South American Bureau of the Comintern warranted a recommendation by the Bureau's chief, the German and former member of the KPD, Arthur Ewert, for the Latin American Secretariat in Moscow, so that they could facilitate Prestes' journey.¹⁹⁹ Prestes' remained in the Soviet Union until 1934, working as an engineer and occasionally partaking in the activities of the Latin American Secretariat. However, despite his best efforts, Prestes was unable to dispel the rejection towards his name that had developed within the PCB.

Between 1930 and 1934, the Brazilian Communist Party had undergone a process of “proletarianization” in line with the directives issued by the 6th Congress of the Communist International. As part of this process, intellectuals were removed from positions of leadership within the party as means to ensure the “hegemony of the proletariat” in conducting the revolutionary struggle.²⁰⁰ In this context, the PCB identified Prestes as a petit-bourgeois leadership, akin to the left-leaning reformist and social-democratic leaders the 6th Congress labelled as the main enemies of communism.²⁰¹ As a result, the party undertook efforts to combat the influence of “prestism” within its ranks. According to the Presidium of the PCB, “the petit-bourgeois forces, even revolutionary ones, cannot bring the masses to victory, they cannot even realize their own

¹⁹⁸ Luis Carlos Prestes, Private Tapes, in Prestes, chap. IV.

¹⁹⁹ Prestes, chap. IV.

²⁰⁰ Political Secretariat of the Comintern, “A Crise Do PCB: Resolução Da Internacional Comunista Sobre a Questão Braileira (1930),” in *O PCB*, ed. Edgar Carone, vol. 1 (São Paulo: DIFEL, 1982), 99.

²⁰¹ *VI Congreso de La Internacional Comunista*, vol. 1, Cuadernos de Pasado y Presente (Ciudad de Mexico: Pasado y Presente, 1977), 105.

slogans. (...) Only the proletariat can take the agrarian and antiimperialist revolution to its definitive triumph.”²⁰²

These statements were published as a rebuttal to the political manifesto issued by Prestes in May 1930. The manifesto, written in response to the alignment of his fellow “lieutenants” to Vargas’ political project, outlined Prestes rejection of the program envisioned by the Liberal Alliance also signaling his sympathy to the PCB’s advocacy of the agrarian and antiimperialist revolution.²⁰³ In an attempt to appease the party, Prestes would eventually write a second document in 1931, explicitly pledging allegiance to the PCB.²⁰⁴ Nonetheless, it was only in 1934, due to pressure from Moscow, that the PCB admitted Prestes into the party.²⁰⁵ At that time, there was already ongoing discussion about the possible revision of the sectarian position adopted by the 6th Congress. The change of strategy formally occurred only in August 1935, following the endorsement of a “united front” strategy by the 7th Congress of the Comintern. However, at least since May, the new directive was being overtly discussed as an alternative to counter the “fascist offensive.”²⁰⁶

These new circumstances motivated Prestes return to Brazil. Now a member of the PCB, Prestes believed he would be more valuable to the party on the ground, leveraging his connections within the military to bolster the party’s ranks.²⁰⁷ Therefore, on December 29, 1934, he boarded a train for Finland, the first destination in a long journey to Rio de Janeiro. Prestes was accompanied by

²⁰² Presidium do PCB, “O Partido Comunista Prante o Manifesto de Luis Carlos Prestes (1930),” in *O PCB*, ed. Edgar Carone, vol. 1 (São Paulo: DIFEL, 1982), 85.

²⁰³ Luis Carlos Prestes, “O Capitão Luiz Carlos Prestes Define a Sua Attitude Actual,” *Diario Da Noite*, May 29, 1930, Hemeroteca Digital.

²⁰⁴ “Artigo Do Diario Da Noite Intitulado ‘Luís Carlos Prestes e Os Seus Antigos Companheiros de Revolução,’” March 28, 1931, CPDOC.

²⁰⁵ Prestes, *Luiz Carlos Prestes*, chap. VI.

²⁰⁶ “The Amsterdam International Is Against Trade Union Unity,” *The Communist International* XII, no. 10 (May 20, 1935): 536.

²⁰⁷ Prestes, *Luiz Carlos Prestes*, chap. VI.

the German-Jewish militant Olga Benário, to whom the Comintern had entrusted Prestes' security. Arthur Ewert, operating under the codename Harry Berger, was also dispatched to Brazil with the task of assisting Prestes and the leadership of the PCB.

Upon his arrival in the Brazilian capital, in April 1935, Prestes encountered a party weakened by its own sectarian policies and the systematic persecution by Vargas' regime. The ANL, by contrast, appeared to be a promising actor for the mobilization of the masses in the direction of a popular revolution. Prestes remained ideologically committed to the political program of the PCB and its goal of establishing a regime governed by councils of workers, peasants, soldiers and sailors. However, in line with the new directives from the Comintern, Prestes pursued the development of closer ties with the ANL. In a letter read to members of the organization during an event celebrating the anniversary of the abolition of slavery, Prestes affirmed his commitment to the ANL: "I join the ANL, in which I want to fight, side by side with all those who are not sold out to imperialism, who want to fight for the national liberation of Brazil."²⁰⁸ The "knight of hope" also emphasized in the letter the role of anti-imperialism and the participation of the masses as central tenets the new organization should uphold, fostering a closer ideological alignment between the ANL and the positions advocated by the PCB.²⁰⁹ The ultimate goal, Prestes argued, was to "sustain a struggle of the masses for the establishment of a national popular revolutionary government," proposal that was embraced by the ANL.²¹⁰

The announcement of Prestes' adherence to the ANL coincided with a similar move by the Central Committee of the PCB. In a plenum held in May 1935, the Central Committee voted to incorporate

²⁰⁸ "O Comício Da Aliança Nacional Libertadora Na Data Da Abolição," *Correio Da Manhã*, May 14, 1935, Hemeroteca Digital.

²⁰⁹ "O Comício Da Aliança Nacional Libertadora Na Data Da Abolição."

²¹⁰ "O Comício Da Aliança Nacional Libertadora Na Data Da Abolição."

the formation of “popular fronts” as part of the party’s strategy.²¹¹ This decision paved the way for the PCB to take part in the ANL. However, distinction persisted between the positions of the Comintern and the PCB regarding the role of the ANL in Brazil’s path to communism. Telegrams sent from Moscow to the Central Committee of the PCB, suggest the Comintern envisioned a more prominent role for the ANL in the formation of a “national popular revolutionary government,” whereas the leadership of the PCB perceived their alliance with the ANL as tactical, a momentary necessity on their path to a government of the soviets.²¹² It was the belief of the leadership of the Brazilian party that the dire economic circumstances and the ongoing political turmoil had created a “revolutionary situation,” based on which they concluded that the time for the masses to take up arms was drawing near.²¹³

2.3.2. Radicalization and Repression

Throughout 1935, the intensified repression carried out by Vargas’ government against the labor movement ultimately contributed to the radicalization of the ANL. Most notably, debates surrounding the approval of the National Security Law served as a significant mobilizing factor for the more radical segments of the ANL, a stance reflected in its manifesto dated July 5, 1935. Written by Prestes, the ANL manifesto called upon the masses and all oppressed classes to prepare for the “irresistible and invincible Brazilian revolution.”²¹⁴ Nonetheless, Prestes elevated the tone,

²¹¹ Prestes, *Luiz Carlos Prestes*, chap. VI.

²¹² Prestes, chap. VI.

²¹³ Miranda, “Como Os Trabalhadores Do Brasil Resolverão a Crise,” March 1935, Arquivo Marxista, https://www.marxists.org/portugues/tematica/jornais/classe_operaria/pdf/51_615.pdf.

²¹⁴ Luis Carlos Prestes, “Manifesto Da ANL,” July 5, 1935, Arquivo Marxista, <https://www.marxists.org/portugues/prestes/1935/07/05.htm>.

alerting members that “power would only reach the hand of the people through the most intense struggles.”²¹⁵

“The situation is one of war in which everyone needs to take their place. It is up to the initiative of the masses themselves to organize the defense of their meetings, guarantee the lives of their leaders and actively prepare for the assault. ‘The idea of the assault is maturing in the consciousness of the great masses.’ It is up to their leaders to organize and lead them.”²¹⁶

It soon became apparent, however, that the leadership of the ANL had overestimated their ability to mobilize its members. Shortly after the manifesto was made public, the Brazilian government, under Vargas, utilized the recently approved National Security Law to shut down the organization. A demonstration against the closure of the ANL was organized in São Paulo and was attended by approximately 500 people. Nevertheless, the general strike many expected would emerge in response to the closure of the ANL never materialized.²¹⁷ In the following months, the ANL continued its operations clandestinely, producing and distributing propaganda materials and organizing smaller events.

The closure of the ANL radicalized the movement even further. In the aftermath of the prohibition, many of the more moderate members and sympathizers sought to distance themselves from the organization, whereas those who remained saw little alternative other than advancing the revolutionary agenda through violent means. During this period, the PCB, more experienced in operating covertly, assumed a greater role in directing the actions of the ANL. The orientation was to stimulate localized revolts aspiring that, eventually, they would result in a national uprising.²¹⁸

²¹⁵ Prestes, July, 1935.

²¹⁶ Prestes, July, 1935.

²¹⁷ Prestes, *Luiz Carlos Prestes*, chap. VI.

²¹⁸ Prestes, chap. VI.

Informed of the plans by the PCB, the Executive Committee of the Comintern agreed to provide funds for a small-scale operation. The Comintern sent approximately 100.000 dollars via the Soviet trading company in Uruguay to fund the Brazilian revolutionary experiment²¹⁹ Preparations began in November, when, in series of meetings held between the 21st and 24th in Rio de Janeiro, the Central Committee of the PCB agreed that the circumstances for an insurrection were favorable.²²⁰ Before they could settle on a date, however, the uprising broke out in the northeastern city of Natal on November 23, 1935. On the following morning, having heard of the events unfolding in Natal, soldiers of the 29th *Batalhão de Caçadores* stationed near the city of Recife followed suit, accompanied by officers of the 7th Military Region and civilians, who took the nearby city of Olinda.²²¹ In Natal, the rebellious forces managed to subdue the resistance of local authorities declaring a popular revolutionary government in the city. In Recife, on the other hand, the arrival of troops stationed in neighboring states of Paraíba and Alagoas allowed legalist forces to contain the uprising. Once victory over the revolutionaries in Recife was secured, on November 25, 1935, the troops from Paraíba and Alagoas were redeployed to Natal, where the fighting continued until November 27.²²²

In Rio de Janeiro, the news of the uprisings in Natal and Recife caught Prestes and the Central Committee of the PCB by surprise. Local leaders affiliated with the PCB and the ANL had been instructed to await orders from Rio de Janeiro before deflagrating the uprising, orders which had not been issued by the time the mutinies in Natal and Recife broke out. Vargas' measures to

²¹⁹ John W. F. Dulles, *Anarquistas e Comunistas No Brasil*, 2nd ed. (Rio de Janeiro: Nova Fronteira, 1977), 424.

²²⁰ Prestes, *Luiz Carlos Prestes*, chap. VI.

²²¹ For a brief description of events, see: Alzira Alves de Abreu, "Revolta Comunista de 1935," in *Dicionário histórico-biográfico da Primeira República (1889 - 1930)*, ed. Alzira Alves de Abreu (Editora FGV, 2015), <https://atlas.fgv.br/verbete/5731>.

²²² Dulles, *Anarquistas e Comunistas No Brasil*, 425; Abreu, "Revolta Comunista de 1935."

suppress the northeastern uprisings were already underway when the news reached Prestes, who called a meeting of the Central Committee to decide on the best course of action. According to Prestes account, members of the Central Committee wavered as they discussed the deflagration of an uprising in the Brazilian capital in support to their comrades fighting in Natal and Recife. Still, those present ultimately agreed that they “could not leave their northeastern comrades” to fight alone.²²³ With the approval of the Central Committee, Prestes issued the orders for the uprising in Rio de Janeiro to commence in the early hours of November 27.

By midday, however, the mutinies in the Brazilian capital had been contained. Among the factors that explain the swift suppression of the revolt, one can include the miscalculations from the revolution leaders in Rio de Janeiro. Once again, the large-scale strikes planned by the Central Committee of the PCB to divert the attention of authorities did not materialize. Moreover, it should be noted that out of the four garrisons the revolutionaries relied upon, only two joined the insurrection. The absence of the element of surprise also contributed to the outcome of uprising, as the mutinies in Natal and Recife had already put federal authorities on high alert. The fact that authorities in the Brazilian capital were well-informed about the plans of Prestes and his comrades was a direct consequence of these preparedness. A day prior to the deflagration of the uprising, agents of the Civilian Police of the Federal District had intercepted communications sent by Prestes to allies in Minas Gerais and Rio Grande do Sul revealing plans for a coordinated action in all three states.²²⁴

²²³ Edgard Carone, “Entrevista: Luís Carlos Prestes,” *Revista Novos Rumos*, no. 33 (May 1999): 31, <https://doi.org/10.36311/0102-5864.15.v0n33.2179>.

²²⁴ Abreu, “Revolta Comunista de 1935.”

With the most acute phase of the uprising contained, Vargas and his chief of police, Filinto Müller, redirected their attention to locating the leaders of the movement who had gone into hiding once the failure of the uprising became apparent. Arthur Ewert and his wife Elise were the first to be arrested in late December 1935. A month later, agents arrested the young U.S. militant Victor Allen Barron, who had also been sent to Brazil by the Comintern at the request of the PCB. Barron died two months later while in custody. Brazilian authorities claimed he committed suicide. However, statements made by Barron's lawyer, Joseph R. Brodsky, contradict this version of events, claiming instead that Barron was tortured and murdered by Brazilian authorities.²²⁵ Prestes and Olga, who had begun a relationship since departing together from the Soviet Union, were arrested on March 6, 1936.

2.4. Brazil Through the Lens of the Third Reich

The year 1935 was also significant in the history of the Third Reich, a significance epitomized by the 7th Congress of the NSDAP held between September 10 and 16 of in the city Nuremberg. It was during this event that the Reichstag, by then dominated by the NSDAP, passed the infamous Nuremberg Laws. Among other measures, these laws forbade marriages between individuals of German and Jewish heritage and decreed the annulment of such marriages concluded prior to their enactment. The laws also established the guidelines for whom would be considered a Jew according to the party's racial criteria, thereby institutionalizing the racist and antisemitic doctrines that informed the Nazi ideology.²²⁶

²²⁵ Amélia Coutinho, "Harry Berger," in *Dicionário histórico-biográfico da Primeira República (1889 - 1930)*, ed. Alzira Alves de Abreu (Editora FGV, 2015), <https://atlas.fgv.br/verbete/5731>.

²²⁶ "Gesetz Zum Schutze Des Deutschen Blutes Und Der Deutschen Ehre," *Reichs-Gesetzblatt*, 1935, 100 edition, https://www.1000dokumente.de/index.html?c=dokument_de&dokument=0007_nue&object=facsimile&st=&l=de.

These events marked the beginning of new phase in the processes of coordination and “cumulative radicalization” of the Third Reich.²²⁷ At that time, parties and movements that could challenge Hitler’s authority had been disbanded, and leading figures that opposed the Nazi dictatorship had been largely neutralized. As a result, the regime was allowed to concentrate its efforts on pursuing its ideological agenda more intensively, namely through a greater emphasis placed on themes related to rearmament and racial policies. The former was particularly relevant to German-Brazilian relations in the mid-1930s. Amidst negotiations for the signature of trade agreement and the impulse for the acquisition of raw materials to sustain Germany’s rearmament policies, trade between Germany and Brazil tripled in the period between 1933 and 1935.²²⁸ Particularly noteworthy was the significant increase in Brazil’s cotton exports to Germany, which surged from 392 tons to more than 82.000 tons within the same period.²²⁹

The Nazi treatment of the issue of communism was also impacted by Hitler’s consolidation of power. The Reichstag Fire and the repression that ensued had severely restricted the operational capabilities of the German communist movement, rendering it incapable of articulating a significant opposition to the regime. By 1935, numerous communist leaders had been arrested and interned in concentration camps such as Nohra, Oranienburg, and Dachau. Others sought asylum abroad, most notably in the Soviet Union. However, the recent memory of the Reichstag fire ensured that communism remained a powerful rhetorical weapon in the Nazi propaganda arsenal. Anticommunism, therefore, continued to play a crucial role as part of strategies designed to

²²⁷ The notion of a cumulative radicalization has been proposed by the German historian Hans Mommsen. See: Hans Mommsen, *Der Nationalsozialismus: Kumulative Radikalisierung und Selbsterstörung des Regimes: Sonderbeitrag*, 1976.

²²⁸ Seitenfus, *O Brasil de Getúlio Vargas e a Formação Dos Blocos, 1930-1942*, 81.

²²⁹ Henrique Agnelli, “Vestindo a Wehrmacht: As Exportações Brasileiras de Algodão Para a Alemanha 1934-1940,” *História Econômica & História de Empresas* 26, no. 1 (2023): 135.

mobilize a sense of dread among the German population, which could be channeled into support for the regime. Also in this regard, the 7th Congress of the NSDAP provides a prime example.

2.4.1. “Communism Without the Mask”

During the rallies in Nuremberg, Goebbels delivered a speech later published under the title “Communism without the mask.” The speech was written in response to an article published in the English press which drew a comparison between “Russia Bolshevism and German National Socialism.”²³⁰ The article allegedly stated that:

“In both countries a similar censorship exists on the arts, literature, and, of course, the press. The same war on the intelligentsia, the attack on religion and the massive display of arms, whether in the Red Square or the Tempelhofer Feld.”²³¹

Throughout the speech, Goebbels sought to discredit this comparison. The anonymous writer, he claims, “has obviously not studied the essential and fundamental principles of either National Socialism or Bolshevism.”²³² Goebbels then proceeded to present his case on the distinction between the ideologies underlying the regimes in Germany and the Soviet Union.

Already in his first lines, Goebbels referenced the racial determinism and essentialism that laid at the core of Nazi ideology. According to Hitler’s propaganda minister, the goal of international communism was to “abolish all national and racial conditions” which he argues are innate to all individuals.²³³ He proceed to contrast the “idealism” of National Socialism to the “dull and barren

²³⁰ Joseph Goebbels, *Kommunismus ohne Maske* (Munich: Franz Eher, 1935), 3.

²³¹ Goebbels, 3.

²³² Goebbels, 3.

²³³ Joseph Goebbels, *Kommunismus ohne Maske* (Munich: Franz Eher, 1935), 4.

materialistic principles” of Bolshevism, distinction later used to imply the relation between the support for communism and the purported materialistic nature of the “Jewish race.”²³⁴

Goebbels claims about race are interwoven with an emphasis on the internationalist character of communism, which he again contrasted with the nationalist attitudes of the Third Reich. According to Goebbels, “Bolshevism deliberately strives to revolutionize all nations. It has within itself an aggressive international tendency. National Socialism, on the other hand, limits itself to Germany and is not an export product, neither as an idea nor as a practice.”²³⁵ With this sentence, Goebbels simultaneously conveyed two complementary but distinct messages. On the one hand, he depicts “Bolshevism” as an imminent global threat echoing not only Hitler but a broader segment of European conservatives who feared the disruption of interwar social and political order. By contrast, the sentence portrayed nationalism and the Nazis in favorable light. The Third Reich is presented as a bastion of western civilization and a benign ally to the opponents of Bolshevism and the international Jewish conspiracy it allegedly advanced. Goebbels summarized this argument by stating that “while National Socialism initiated a new version and form of European culture, Bolshevism is the declaration of war against culture itself by the international sub-humans led by the Jews.”²³⁶

The imagery of violence depicted in Nazi anticommunist posters is also referenced in Goebbels’ speech. Goebbels dedicated an extensive passage to listing the various crimes and acts of violence he attributed to communists since the Paris Commune, through the Bolshevik Revolution and Bela Kun’s Republic of Councils in Hungary, to the 1930s and the murders perpetrated by the Jiangxi

²³⁴ Joseph Goebbels, *Kommunismus ohne Maske* (Munich: Franz Eher, 1935), 4.

²³⁵ Joseph Goebbels, *Kommunismus ohne Maske* (Munich: Franz Eher, 1935), 4.

²³⁶ Joseph Goebbels, *Kommunismus ohne Maske* (Munich: Franz Eher, 1935), 5.

Soviet in China. Hitler's minister did not miss the opportunity to point to the participation of Jewish individuals in these crimes whenever possible. In some cases, the involvement of the individuals cited as well as their Jewish heritage is well documented. In others, as was the case for the Jewish individuals the Nazi minister accused of murdering Tsar Nicholas II, no other document seems to corroborate Goebbels' version of the events.²³⁷

In these first pages, Goebbels' arguments largely echoed the main tenets of Nazi anticommunism. He reinforced the centrality of these issues reaffirming them in his concluding remarks: the Jewish connection to the origins and promotion of Marxism, the threat posed by the "world revolution" as well as his claims about the inherently violent nature of Bolshevism. Nonetheless, Goebbels incorporated to his speech some less usual arguments catered to conservative audiences.

The issue of religion, in particular, stands out as often neglected theme in Nazi anticommunism materials. This is consistent with the opportunistic use of religious discourses and imagery by the NSDAP throughout the interwar period. The Nazi position on religion was perhaps best articulated in point 24 of the 1920 National Socialist Program. As stated in the Program, the NSDAP did not affiliate with any religion or denomination. Religious institutions and manifestations were tolerated "so long as they did not endanger the existence of the state or oppose the morality of the Germanic race."²³⁸ It explicitly rejects, however, the supposed "Jewish-materialistic spirit," asserting the primacy of race over religious doctrine – a framework embodied in the concept of "positive Christianity."²³⁹ These principles oriented the party's propaganda and the crafting of its

²³⁷ Joseph Goebbels, *Kommunismus ohne Maske* (Munich: Franz Eher, 1935), 7.

²³⁸ Anton Drexler, "Auszug Aus Dem Programm Der National-Sozialistischen Deutschen Arbeiter-Partei" (Munich, February 24, 1920), Deutsches Historisches Museum, <https://www.dhm.de/lemo/bestand/objekt/gruendungsprogramm-der-nsdap-1920.html>.

²³⁹ Drexler, 1920.

public image during the Third Reich. According to Albert Speer, Hitler's personal architect and confidant, it was not uncommon for Hitler to speak in private against clergymen and the Church.²⁴⁰ Goebbels made similar remarks in his diaries stating that the Führer was "the harshest critic" of the Vatican and Christianity.²⁴¹ Nonetheless, Hitler presented himself in public as a Christian and avoided antagonizing the Church in his public appearances. Hitler remained a member of the Catholic Church until his death in 1945 and forbade his closest associates, notably Göring and Goebbels, from forgoing their religious affiliations, decision that according to Goebbels was made purely for tactical reasons.²⁴²

The mention to religion and Christianity in Goebbels anticommunist speech appears to have a similarly opportunistic function. Resorting to the Manichaeic rhetoric that underlays the whole of his exposition, Goebbels emphasized the "programmatically atheistic international Bolshevism" to which he contrasted an image of the Third Reich as a tolerant regime with regards to religion. Religious disputes in Germany, he assured, could arise from the "deepest pangs of conscience but never led to the denial of religion per se."²⁴³ Conversely, he claimed, "Marxism regards all contemporary religions and churches, all and any religious organizations, as organs of bourgeois reaction."²⁴⁴ Goebbels built upon these claims to construe an association between the Marxist critique of religion and the rejection of Christian morals. "Marxist atheism," Hitler's minister argued, was not only responsible for the wave of withdrawals from Germany's Evangelical Churches. It also envisioned the decriminalization of abortion, the abolition of legislation

²⁴⁰ Albert Speer, *Erinnerungen* (Frankfurt: Verlag Ullstein, 1969), 109.

²⁴¹ Reuth, *Joseph Goebbels Tagebücher*, 1569.

²⁴² Reuth, *Joseph Goebbels Tagebücher*, 1569. See also: Albert Speer, *Erinnerungen*, 109.

²⁴³ Goebbels, *Kommunismus ohne Maske*, 20.

²⁴⁴ Goebbels, *Kommunismus ohne Maske*, 20-21.

regulating marriage and divorce and the abrogation of all penalties for “sexual perversities,” arguments appealed not only to fervent Nazi supporters but resonated also with larger segments of the populations, most of which identified as Christian.²⁴⁵

“That is communism without the mask,” Goebbels uttered. “This is nothing else than the large-scale attempt by the Jews to expropriate and dispossess the Aryan upper class in all nations and replace them with the Jewish underworld.” With this conclusion, Goebbels leaves little doubt as to the centrality of race in the conceptualization of Nazi anticommunism. In his view, as well as in the views of Hitler and other party leaders, the Jews had conceived Marxism. It was also the Jews who controlled it and used it as a vehicle to foment the world revolution. By contrast, according to Goebbels, the Third Reich represented the bastion of European civilization against the spread of Bolshevism. In Goebbels’s words:

“It is perhaps the greatest service that the Führer has rendered for the whole of humanity beyond his German mission that he opposed the onslaught of world Bolshevism in Germany with a dam against which the waves of this Asian-Jewish flood of filth broke.”²⁴⁶

2.4.2. German Newspapers and the Brazilian Uprising

The speech delivered by Goebbels provides a pertinent insight into the political atmosphere in Germany with regards to communism at the time of the uprisings in Brazil. The idea of defending Germany and the German race against the purported threat of Judeo-Bolshevism remained as common trope of Nazi propaganda, which had the goal preserving among the German public the image of communist as an imminent threat to their prosperity and security. It is no surprise, therefore, that once news of the uprising in Brazil reached Germany, the *Völkischer Beobachter*,

²⁴⁵ Goebbels, *Kommunismus ohne Maske*, 22.

²⁴⁶ Goebbels, *Kommunismus ohne Maske*, 31.

official press organ of the NSDAP, commended the Brazilian government for the swift repression of the movement. In an article published on November 27, 1935, the Nazi newspaper portrayed Brazil as a “beacon” in the global struggle against bolshevism.²⁴⁷

“Today there are reports from Brazil of the bloody battles that the government authorities are having to wage against the communist revolutionaries. (...) The Brazilian government deserves the thanks of the entire cultural world (*Kulturwelt*) for its swift and energetic action, which alone prevented this new catastrophe for culture.”²⁴⁸

The article further presented the events occurred in Brazil as the confirmation of the Nazi beliefs that portrayed bolshevism as a global threat to the civilized world. According to the article:

“The bloody battles that other nations are having to wage against Bolshevism these days prove how clearly Adolf Hitler understood the question of the fate of European culture. It is time for other countries to finally begin to see these facts without concealment. And perhaps there, too, where only recently there has been talk of a lively desire for pacification, it will be recognized that the precondition for world peace is the isolation of the Bolshevik center of unrest.”²⁴⁹

The uprisings in Brazil were also closely monitored by the *Deutsches Nachrichtenbüro* (DNB), a news agency operating under the auspices of Department IV of the Ministry of Propaganda and Public Enlightenment. As early as November 26, the DNB reported on the communist nature of the uprisings underway in Natal and Recife. The article outlined the situation in both cities, anticipating the possibility that the unrest could spread to other locations. It also highlighted the measures undertaken by the Brazilian government, including the declaration of “state of siege” throughout the country and the employment of aircrafts in Recife, which, the article notes, prevented the landing of the German airship Graf Zeppelin.²⁵⁰ On that same day, the agency produced two other notes regarding the unrest in Brazil relaying the deployment of the Cruzers

²⁴⁷ “Fanal Brasilien,” *Völkische Beobachter*, November 27, 1935, File R4902/5061, Bundesarchiv.

²⁴⁸ “Fanal Brasilien.”

²⁴⁹ “Fanal Brasilien.”

²⁵⁰ “Der Kommunistenaufrüstung in Brasilien - Luftschiff ‘Graf Eppelin’ Kann Nicht Landen - Belagerungszustand Über Das Ganze Land Verhängt,” *Deutsche Nachrichtensbüro*, November 26, 1935, File R4902/5061, Bundesarchiv.

“Bahia” and “Rio Grande do Sul” in the suppression of the revolts and the defeat of the rebellious forces in Recife.²⁵¹

Unlike the article in the *Völkischer Beobachter*, the notes produced by the DNB had a less partisan tone. They aimed to emulate the format used by established Western news agencies in order to conceal its subordination to the ProMi, a directive that was part of Goebbels’ strategy to protect the image of Hitler’s regime abroad. In spite of these efforts, the coverage of the uprisings in Brazil is noteworthy for its unusual nature. It was uncommon for Nazi-produced materials to address themes of Brazilian domestic politics, let alone to extend their coverage over several articles distributed across multiple days. This peculiarity, when analyzed in conjunction with the ideas presented in the *Völkischer Beobachter* article, indicates the interest of the propaganda apparatus of the regime in instrumentalizing the Brazilian uprisings as part of its anticommunist narrative. In other words, the Third Reich hoped Brazil would serve as a cautionary tale to the German public about the threat posed by Bolshevism, one that could help galvanize support for the persecutory measures against political enemies undertaken by the Hitler’s regime.

A similar argument can be made regarding the coverage of the uprisings in Brazil by newspapers such as the *Berliner Börsenzeitung*, the *Berliner Tageblatt*, and the *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*. The *Berliner Börsenzeitung*, for instance, dedicated two articles to the collapse of the communist revolts in Brazil on November 27. For the article titled “Rebels on the run,” the German paper quoted the notes provided by the DNB, referencing the deployment of the Cruzers “Bahia” and “Rio Grande do Sul” as well as the challenges encountered by the crew of the Graf Zeppelin upon

²⁵¹ “Die Lage Im Nordbrasilianischen Aufstandsgebiet,” *Deutsche Nachrichtensbüro*, November 26, 1935, File R4902/5061, Bundesarchiv; “Der Aufstand in Pernambuco Niedergeworfen,” *Deutsche Nachrichtensbüro*, November 26, 1935, File R4902/5061, Bundesarchiv.

their arrival in Brazil.²⁵² Conversely, in the article “Brazilian revolt collapses,” the editors of the *Börsenzeitung* conveyed in a clearer manner their position with regards to the events unfolding in the South American nation. According to the article, Brazil stood as evidence that “most of the world's states are playgrounds for Bolshevik agitation and can, at the whim of Moscow's Comintern, become the object of a vicious experiment that threatens the existence of entire nations from one day to the next.”²⁵³

The articles on the *Berliner Tageblatt* and the *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* appeared on November 28, providing additional insights into the different ways in which the unrest in Brazil was interpreted in Germany. The *Tageblatt* article highlighted the cultural influence of France among Brazilian intellectuals as vector for the dissemination of communist ideas in Brazil.²⁵⁴ It argued that since the 18th century, the Brazilian intelligentsia had come into contact with “French ideas” while pursuing their education in Portugal, and upon their return to Brazil, brought along with them the ideas of “Rousseau, Boissy d’Anglas, (and) Helvetius.”²⁵⁵ The article attributed to this phenomenon the emergence of independentist idea in Brazil and the permanence of the French cultural influence in the country. Consequently, the article claimed, the embracing of the Soviet model by French left-wing parties facilitated the arrival of communism on Brazilian shores.

“This indirect cultural shaping of Brazil by French science and culture was followed by political influences of no less force. Here, the Paris-Moscow pact has become the most important event for Brazil's already agitated internal political atmosphere, where communism has been rearing its threatening head for several years, imported by political agents and nourished by the severe economic crisis in South America - in this case, as elsewhere, Parisian steps and announcements had a hundred times stronger resonance in the Brazilian imagination and were

²⁵² “Rebellen Auf Der Flucht,” *Berliner Börsenzeitung*, November 27, 1935, File R4902/5061, Bundesarchiv.

²⁵³ “Brasilien-Revolte Bricht Zusammen,” *Berliner Börsenzeitung*, November 27, 1935, File R4902/5061, Bundesarchiv.

²⁵⁴ “Brasilien-Paris-Moskau,” *Berliner Tageblatt*, November 28, 1935, File R4902/5061, Bundesarchiv.

²⁵⁵ “Brasilien-Paris-Moskau.”

believed a hundred times more brusquely than anywhere in Europe and even on Parisian soil.”²⁵⁶

On the other hand, the article published in the *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, emphasized the domestic conditions that engendered the communist uprising in Brazil. Authored by the German-Brazilian Karl-Heinrich Hunsche, the article presents a narrative of events informed by a Brazilian perspective, providing greater details about the creation of the ANL, its program, Prestes’ connections to Moscow, and the role of Filinto Müller in the uncovering the plans for overthrowing Vargas.²⁵⁷ While his position regarding the Third Reich cannot be inferred from the article, Hunsche echoed tropes typical of contemporary anticommunist discourses, particularly the reference to the “hand of Moscow” as the driving force behind local uprising across the globe. Said reference, evidenced in the title of the article, “The Hand of Moscow in Brazil,” is contradicted by his account, which largely focused on the agency of local actors in precipitating and suppressing the uprising in Brazil. Although Hunsche mentioned Prestes’ period in the Soviet Union and his participation in the 7th Congress of the Comintern, he attributed the uprising to the initiatives of Prestes and the ANL, not the Comintern. In Hunsche’s words:

“Prestes had recognized that, as a result of the progress that the national idea had made in the meantime, not only in Europe but also in South America, a movement of an international and communist character would have very little chance of success. That is why he called the cuckoo’s egg that he laid in the nest of unsuspecting Brazilian nationalism the ‘National Liberation Alliance.’”²⁵⁸

In contrast with the *Völkischer Beobachter* and the DNB, the *Berliner Börsenzeitung*, the *Berliner Tageblatt*, and the *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* operated with a greater degree of autonomy from

²⁵⁶ “Brasilien-Paris-Moskau.”

²⁵⁷ Karl-Heinrich Hunsche, “Moskaus Hand in Brasilien,” *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, November 28, 1935, File R4902/5061, Bundesarchiv.

²⁵⁸ His depiction mistakenly attributed to Prestes the choice of ANL’s name. The name was chosen prior to Prestes’ pledge of allegiance to the organization as mentioned in this chapter. Hunsche.

the ProMi. Hunsche's article, in particular, illustrates that authors and editors had some leeway to write their stories from a particular angle or personal perspective, provided the ideas conveyed did not defy the ideological directives of Hitler's regime. However, it is possible to assert that the articles published received at least the implicit endorsement of the Nazi propaganda apparatus.

Since the establishment of the ProMi and subsequent creation of the Reich Press Chamber, the Nazis maintained a rigorous control over the German press. For instance, journalists and editors were required to register with the Press Chamber, facilitating the vetting of individuals aligned with the ideological tenets of the Third Reich. Individuals critical of the regime as well as those classified as Jews were excluded from the profession and often replaced by individuals appointed by the NSDAP.²⁵⁹ In this regard, the case of the *Berliner Tageblatt* is emblematic. Founded as a liberal newspaper by the Jewish publicist Rudolf Mosse, the *Tageblatt* was "aryanized" following Hitler's rise to power. For their criticism of Hitler and the Nazis, the Mosse family was labelled "Bolshevists" by the regime. Consequently, they had a ban on their publications introduced and their property invaded by SA troops. The regime also threatened the owners of the *Tageblatt* with the revocation of their passports, ultimately leading the family to seek exile in Switzerland.²⁶⁰ The management of the *Tageblatt* was subsequently transferred to Dr. Kurt Häntzschel, representative of the Reich Interior Ministry, and the notary Fritz Scheuermann, figures appointed by the NSDAP, who instituted an editorial policy more closely aligned with the ideology of the regime.²⁶¹

²⁵⁹ "Schriftleitergesetz," *Reichsgesetzblatt I*, October 7, 1933.

²⁶⁰ Claudia Marwede-Dengg, "Die Enteignung Der Familie Lachmann-Mosse," Mosse Art Research Initiative, accessed July 16, 2024, <https://www.mari-portal.de/page/die-enteignung-der-familie-lachmann-mosse>.

²⁶¹ See: Marwede-Dengg, "Die Enteignung Der Familie Lachmann-Mosse."

; United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, "The Press in the Third Reich," Holocaust Encyclopedia, accessed July 16, 2024, <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/the-press-in-the-third-reich>.

The ProMi further ensured its control over newspapers circulating in Germany through daily conferences held in Berlin in which guidelines regarding the themes and tone of the coverage were distributed to editors. As mentioned above, authors and editors were not required to replicate these instructions verbatim in their articles, provided they did not defy the ProMi's directives. It was imperative, nonetheless, that the articles presented a perspective aligned with the one advocated by the regime, thereby reinforcing and lending additional credibility to the official narrative concerning a given event. Thus, despite being presented from distinct angles, the publication of articles regarding the communist uprising in Brazil in non-official press outlets underscores the assertion that Hitler's regime sought to exploit this event for propaganda purposes.

2.4.3. Brazil as a Potential Ally

The defeat of the communist uprising in Brazil occurred at a juncture when German-Brazilian initiatives, previously hindered by diplomatic challenges, were coming to fruition. In the year that followed, Brazil and Germany finalized a trade agreement that had been under negotiation since 1934. In the same period, the two countries agreed to elevate their diplomatic missions from the status of legations to that of embassies, signaling their intent to strengthen diplomatic ties. However, the awareness in Germany of the events occurred in Brazil in November 1935 prompted the rapid conversion of anticommunism into a prominent theme in the bilateral agenda between the Third Reich and the South American nation.

As early as January 29, 1936, Hitler pointed the struggle against communism as a fundamental issue that brought Brazil and Germany closer together. The Nazi dictator described the moment as “decisive, a matter of life or death,” concluding that the “civilized world will either defeat or be

devoured by communist.”²⁶² Hitler’s remarks were made during a meeting with the Brazilian diplomat Moniz de Aragão, scheduled for the presentation of his credentials as the newly appointed head of the Brazilian diplomatic mission to Germany. In a report to his superiors, the Brazilian diplomat noted that the meeting was remarkably long, “even exceeding what is usually allotted to meetings of this nature.”²⁶³ According to Moniz de Aragão, Hitler entrusted him with conveying to “our President of the Republic his most effusive congratulations for having been able to quell the recent communist uprising that erupted in Brazil.”²⁶⁴ The Brazilian diplomat notes that Hitler followed “with great interest the work performed by the Brazilian government towards defending itself against the propaganda and the revolutionary action of Moscow,” emphasizing the relevance of South America as a battleground in the global struggle against communism.

After the formalities of presenting credentials were concluded, the Brazilian diplomat remained at the Reich Chancellery for a private meeting with Hitler. Once more, the struggle against communism emerged as a prominent topic. Speaking confidentially to the Brazilian diplomat, Hitler underscored the importance of a relentless fight against international communism, placing at the disposal of the Brazilian government the expertise the Nazi regime had acquired on the matter. In Hitler’s words, as quoted in the report by Moniz de Aragão: “It is necessary to show no mercy towards them (communists), as they are brutally barbaric against our culture and social organization.”²⁶⁵ The Nazi dictator complemented these remarks by suggesting the world could benefit from “a global defensive alliance against the red invasion from Moscow.”²⁶⁶

²⁶² José Joaquim Moniz de Aragão, “Entrega de Credenciaes Do Ministro Moniz de Aragão” (Berlin, January 29, 1936), Itamaraty.

²⁶³ Moniz de Aragão.

²⁶⁴ Moniz de Aragão.

²⁶⁵ Moniz de Aragão.

²⁶⁶ Moniz de Aragão.

Hitler's comments to Moniz de Aragão signaled his disposition to cooperate with Brazilian authorities in combatting communism internationally, marking the onset of a material anticommunist collaboration between the two countries. Having Moniz de Aragão and the Brazilian Embassy in Berlin as mediators, Brazilian and German authorities initiated a systematic exchange of information that involved Vargas' political police in Brazil as well as the *Gestapo* and the *Abwehr* in Germany.²⁶⁷ These exchanges would soon prove decisive for the identification of the German nationals accused of involvement in the communist uprisings in Brazil. These individuals would eventually become the first victims of the German-Brazilian anticommunist collaboration.

2.5. The First Victims of the German-Brazilian Cooperation

The involvement of German nationals in orchestrating the communist uprising in Brazil elevated the issue of communism to a position of prominence in the bilateral agenda between the two countries. Particularly after the arrest of Arthur and Elise Ewert, in December 1935, contacts between Brazilian and German authorities intensified, centering on the negotiation of a treaty covering extradition and judicial assistance. Negotiations had begun in 1934, but it was only in 1935, amidst escalating tensions between Vargas and the ANL, that formal proposals were exchanged. Despite the urgency expressed by Brazilian authorities, the unwillingness on both sides to reach a compromise hindered the negotiations. From the Brazilian perspective, the signature of an extradition treaty was considered a priority. To expedite its signing, Brazilian authorities suggested dividing the German proposal into two distinct parts: the first addressing extradition and

²⁶⁷ The *Gestapo*, or *Geheime Staatspolizei*, functioned as political police during the Third Reich. The *Abwehr* corresponded to an Intelligence Agency, which after 1935 was placed under the command of Admiral Wilhelm Canaris.

the second, to be negotiated afterwards, focusing on judicial cooperation, suggestion rejected by the Reich Minister of Justice, Franz Gürtner.²⁶⁸ Furthermore, Germany opposed what its envoy in Brazil qualified as “peculiarities of the Brazilian proposal.”²⁶⁹ These included the obligation to punish its own nationals in case of non-extradition, the requirement to dispatch officials to identify and collect the individual in question, and the condition of non-execution of death sentences.²⁷⁰ Negotiations ultimately failed as German and Brazilian authorities were unable to overcome these differences. Nonetheless, the Brazilian government expressed its willingness to cooperate with Germany on a case-by-case basis.²⁷¹

2.5.1. The Exchange of Information

Initially, the anticommunist collaboration between Brazil and Germany materialized through the exchange of information. The Brazilian Embassy in Berlin received copies of pictures and documents belonging to the Ewert couple which it remitted to the Gestapo for confirmation of the couple’s identities.²⁷² Concomitantly, proceedings for the expulsion of the couple from Brazil were initiated. While awaiting a decision, both Arthur and his wife were kept in a detention facility where they were repeatedly interrogated and subjected to torture.²⁷³ Throughout her time in prison, Elise Ewert exchanged letter with Arthur’s sister, Minna, in which she reported the abuses

²⁶⁸ Mario Pimental Brandão, “Note by Brazilian Foreign Minister Regarding the Extradition Treaty,” September 14, 1936, File R3001/22945, Bundesarchiv.

²⁶⁹ Wolfgang Dittler, “Entwurf Eines Deutsch-Brasilianischen Auslieferungsvertrages,” March 30, 1936, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts; Pimental Brandão, “Note by Brazilian Foreign Minister Regarding the Extradition Treaty.”

²⁷⁰ Wolfgang Dittler, “Entwurf Eines Deutsch-Brasilianischen Auslieferungsvertrages,” March 30, 1936, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts.

²⁷¹ Pimental Brandão, “Note by Brazilian Foreign Minister Regarding the Extradition Treaty.”

²⁷² Reinhard Heydrich, “Zusammenarbeit Der Brasilianischen Polizei Mit Der Deutsche Polizei Zur Bekämpfung Des Kommunismus,” April 17, 1936, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts.

²⁷³ Shawn C. Smallman, “Military Terror and Silence in Brazil, 1910-1945,” *Canadian Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies / Revue Canadienne Des Études Latino-Américaines et Caraïbes* 24, no. 47 (1999): 16, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41800081>.

committed by the Brazilian police. With the information provided by Elise, Minna, who resided in the United Kingdom, launched a campaign for the release of Arthur and Elise. In an article published by *The Times*, Minna described the violence perpetrated against her brother and sister-in-law obtaining support for her cause from human rights activists and organizations not only in England, but also in the United States. Minna also sought the assistance of the German Embassy in London through which she dispatched her letters to Elise. She was unaware, however, that her letters were being shared with Brazilian authorities by the Gestapo. Describing the content of the letters, the Brazilian Ambassador in Berlin, José Joaquim Moniz de Aragão, informed his superiors that they “contained tendentious comments about the processes to which those responsible for the communist movement of November 1935 were subjected in our country.”²⁷⁴ He notes that Minna was assisted by “the British propagandist Lady Hastings, in collaboration with Lady Astor, who developed a campaign in the press to promote in that country (England) and in the United States an environment of animosity against Brazil.”²⁷⁵ These led to inquiries by British courts that accused Brazil of mistreating the imprisoned communists and restricting their right to a fair trial.²⁷⁶

Additionally, Hitler’s secret police also reported to the Brazilian Embassy on Minna’s intentions to travel to Brazil with the intent of pressing Brazilian authorities to release the Ewerts. It was the concern of the Brazilian Ambassador that upon her arrival, Minna Ewert could garner support for local communists. The visit could represent a threat to Brazil’s social order, the ambassador continued, as Minna was “an intelligent agitator, with prestige within the III International in Moscow, disposing of valuable elements for (developing) an intense communist propaganda”²⁷⁷

²⁷⁴ José Joaquim Moniz de Aragão, “Comunismo. Cartas de Minna Ewert” (Berlin, May 27, 1937), Itamaraty.

²⁷⁵ Moniz de Aragão.

²⁷⁶ Moniz de Aragão.

²⁷⁷ Moniz de Aragão.

Minna also spoke of Prestes and Olga in her letters. They had been arrested a few months after the Ewert couple and maintained initially in the same detention facilities. Upon their arrest, Olga and Prestes were placed in separate prison cells and interrogated. The Brazilian police had no problem identifying Prestes, who was well-known nationwide since the 1920s. Nonetheless, the identity of the woman captured alongside him was still unknown. At that point, all they knew was her first name, Olga.²⁷⁸

Despite the violent treatment afforded to her during the interrogations, Olga refused to provide additional information about herself. When asked, she presented herself as Maria Bergner Vilar, Brazilian, and the wife of Luís Carlos Prestes.²⁷⁹ Here again, the cordial relations between the Brazilian Ambassador and the Gestapo proved useful to the Brazilian police. In a confidential report to Vargas' minister of foreign affairs, José Carlos Macedo Soares, Moniz de Aragão reported having notified the Gestapo about the arrest of a yet unidentified woman. He informed his superiors that according to intelligence provided by Hitler's secret police the woman "cited in the Brazilian newspapers as the wife of Luís Carlos Prestes can be identified as Olga Benário, a truly efficient communist agent of the Third International, one of great intelligence and courage."²⁸⁰ He further mentions that Olga was "of Israelite race, born on February 12, 1908, in Munich, Bavaria."²⁸¹ Moniz de Aragão proceeded to report on Olga's involvement with the communist movement in Germany and her relations with the German communist Otto Braun. It was suspected the Otto could have travelled to Brazil to assist with uprising in 1935. Therefore, attached to his report, the

²⁷⁸ For a detailed description of Olga's arrest see: Fernando Morais, *Olga* (São Paulo, SP: Companhia Digital, 2022), chap. 11.

²⁷⁹ Morais, chap. 13.

²⁸⁰ José Joaquim Moniz de Aragão, "A Propaganda Comunista No Brasil" (Berlin, April 24, 1936), Itamaraty. See also: Morais, *Olga*, chap. 13.

²⁸¹ José Joaquim Moniz de Aragão, "A Propaganda Comunista No Brasil" (Berlin, April 24, 1936), Itamaraty. See also: Morais, *Olga*, chap. 13.

Brazilian Ambassador remitted pictures and fingerprints of Olga and Otto so they could be identified by Brazilian authorities stressing that these documents had been provided to him by the Gestapo.²⁸²

2.5.2. The Expulsions of Olga Benário and Elise Ewert

By the time of her arrest, Olga was pregnant with a daughter fathered by Prestes. She hoped her marriage to Prestes, a Brazilian citizen, and her pregnancy with a child who, under the prevailing legislation, would also be considered a Brazilian national, would reduce the likelihood of her deportation to Germany. Moreover, as in the case of Elise Ewert, the Brazilian police had not uncovered sufficient evidence implicating Olga in the events of November 1935. From the perspective of Vargas' political police, however, leaving the wives of the main leaders of the communist uprising unpunished was inconceivable. The absence of evidence rendered it difficult for Brazilian authorities to prosecute Olga and Elise in Brazilian courts. Nonetheless, their close association with the leaders of the 1935 communist uprising provided sufficient grounds for their expulsion from the country under the pretext they represented a potential threat to national security.²⁸³

No evidence was found indicating a formal request from the German government for the extradition of Olga and Elise, suggesting that the directive to surrender them to Hitler's regime was issued unilaterally by Vargas. In a final attempt to prevent the expulsion, attorney Heitor Lima filled a writ of *habeas corpus* with the Brazilian Supreme Court on behalf of Olga. However, the Brazilian Supreme Court denied the petition, invoking the state of siege decreed following the

²⁸² José Joaquim Moniz de Aragão, "A Propaganda Comunista No Brasil" (Berlin, April 24, 1936), Itamaraty. See also: Morais, *Olga*, chap. 13.

²⁸³ Morais, *Olga*, chap. 13.

communist uprising, under which the justices claimed the constitutional guarantee of *habeas corpus* had been suspended.²⁸⁴ Consequently, Olga and Elise were expelled from Brazil and transported to Germany in September 1936.

Olga and Elise arrived the following month at the port of Hamburg, where they were awaited by Gestapo officers. It is speculated that Elise was taken to a detention center for political criminals near Lübeck, whereas Olga was taken to the women's detention facility at *Barnimstraße*, in Berlin.²⁸⁵ Olga's daughter, Anita Leocádia, was born while she was detained at *Barnimstraße*. As a result of the international campaign mobilized by Prestes' mother and sister, who resided in France, the baby was handed over to the grandmother once Olga could no longer breastfeed. In 1938, Olga and Elise were transferred to the concentration camp of Lichtenburg. They were relocated again in 1939, to the concentration camp of Ravensbrück. Elise died at Ravensbrück as a result of mistreatment. Olga was killed in a gas chamber at the Bernburg Euthanasia Center in 1942.²⁸⁶ Arthur Ewert remained imprisoned in Brazil until he granted amnesty in 1945. The severity of the torture to which he was subjected led to a profound deterioration of his mental health, resulting in his confinement to psychiatric facilities. Initially treated in Brazil, he was later transferred to institutions in the German Democratic Republic after 1946, where he remained until his death in 1959.²⁸⁷

²⁸⁴ Edmundo Pereira Lins, Habeas Corpus N. 26.155 (Supremo Tribunal Federal June 17, 1936).

²⁸⁵ Morais, *Olga*, chap. 16.

²⁸⁶ For the biographies of Elise and Olga, see respectively: Ronald Friedmann, *Sabo: das kurze Leben der Elise Ewert* (Berlin: Dr. Ronald Friedmann, 2022); Morais, *Olga*.

²⁸⁷ Coutinho, "Harry Berger."

Concluding Remarks

The events of November 1935 in Brazil marked the beginning of a new moment in bilateral relations between the regimes of Hitler and Vargas. Following the communist uprisings in Brazil, the cooperation between the two countries acquired a concrete political dimension which complemented the existing economic agenda that marked German-Brazilian relations in the early 1930s. While, prior to 1935, relations with Brazil were perceived as instrumental – centered fundamentally on the acquisition of raw materials by the Third Reich – Vargas' ferocious suppression of the communist uprisings altered the Nazi regime's perception of the South American nation, which began to be identified as a potential partner in Hitler's international struggle against communism.

The unusual coverage by the German press of the uprisings in Brazil, spanning multiple days and several articles across various newspapers, exemplifies the relevance the theme acquired in the eyes of the Nazi propaganda apparatus. The case of Brazil provided a powerful propaganda tool as it appeared to confirm Nazi portrayals of communism as a global and imminent threat, discourse evident in Goebbels' speech at the rally in Nuremberg only months prior to the revolts in Brazil. The agency of local actors was largely disregarded in favor of a narrative that depicted the events in Brazil as a result of direct actions of the Comintern. Not even the article written by the German-Brazilian Karl-Heinrich Hunsche escaped this trope, albeit his description of events placed greater emphasis on the local circumstances that engendered the communist insurrections of 1935.

The appropriation of the events unfolding in Brazil for propaganda purposes becomes apparent in the article by the *Völkischer Beobachter* and the releases by the *Deutsches Nachrichtenbüro* (DNB), both of which were under the umbrella of Hitler's Ministry of Propaganda and Public

Enlightenment (ProMi). These not only portrayed the Brazilian uprisings as confirmation of Hitler's statements on communism but also commended Vargas and the Brazilian authorities for their swift and forceful action against the movement. While the other newspapers cited were not under direct control of Goebbels' ProMi, the regulation and censorship of the media practiced by the Nazi regime ensured they fulfilled a similar purpose. Their depictions of the events in Brazil, while conveyed in a less partisan tone, depicted many of the same ideas and on occasion referenced materials produced by the regime's propaganda apparatus.

Besides its usefulness for propaganda purposes, however, the aftermath of the communist uprisings of 1935 in Brazil saw the intensification of the material cooperation between Brazil and Germany centered on combating communism. Through the Brazilian Embassy in Berlin, Brazilian authorities submitted materials to the Gestapo and obtained assistance in identifying the German citizens involved in the planning and execution of the uprisings in Brazil. Through this form of technical cooperation, the Brazilian police was able to identify and obtain detailed information on Arthur Ewert and Olga Benário, both arrested alongside their partners in the first semester of 1936.

Despite the failure to finalize an extradition treaty, Brazil and Germany exhibited a strong disposition to cooperate on the persecution of communists. This was done initially through the exchange of information, as mentioned above. Nonetheless, the partnership rapidly evolved to incorporate the expulsion and transport of German nationals accused of taking part in the Brazilian revolution. This aspect of the collaboration resulted in some of the most devastating consequences, as illustrated by the cases of Elise Ewert and Olga. Both women endured severe mistreatment in Brazilian detention facilities before being expelled and handed over to the Gestapo in 1936. Elise

ultimately perished at the Ravensbrück concentration camp. Olga, who was also Jewish and seven months pregnant at the time of her deportation, gave birth to her daughter in prison and was subsequently executed in a gas chamber at Bernburg in 1942.

Through these measures, the affinity between the authoritarianism and anticommunism of Vargas and Hitler materialized, inaugurating a period of intensified collaborations between Brazil and Germany that would last until 1938. During this period, anticommunism emerged, alongside trade, as a cornerstone of Brazilian relations with Nazi Germany. Nonetheless, as this chapter demonstrates, said prominence of anticommunism in the German-Brazilian bilateral agenda can be directly traced to the communist uprisings that occurred in various parts of Brazil in November 1935.

Chapter

3. Forging an Alliance: Anticommunism and the development of the German-Brazilian cooperation

Introduction

The aftermath of the communist uprisings in Brazil marked the onset of the most significant phase of the anticommunist cooperation between Brazil and the Third Reich. What began as a modest initiative focused on information exchange evolved into more intricate forms of collaboration, encompassing the sharing of intelligence and counterintelligence methods, police cooperation, and joint efforts for the dissemination of anticommunist propaganda.

However, shifts in the international landscape, motivated by a more assertive U.S. approach to hemispheric relations, ultimately disrupted the progression of this partnership, prompting a change in Brazil's foreign policy stance following the establishment of the Estado Novo in November 1937. This chapter examines the development of anticommunist collaboration between the Vargas government and Hitler's regime, addressing Brazil's stance on the Nazi sponsored Anti-Comintern Pact, and the United States' response to the diplomatic rapprochement between Brazil and Nazi Germany.

3.1. Brazil and The Anti-Comintern Pact

The uprisings in Brazil were part of a broader series of international events that brought the struggle against communism to the forefront of Hitler's diplomatic agenda in 1936. In East Asia, skirmishes between Japan and the Soviet Union signaled to the Nazis the potential disposition of Imperial Japan to take part in an alliance founded upon their mutual antagonism towards the Soviet regime. Meanwhile, in Europe, the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War and Hitler's decision to intervene in the conflict underscored the escalating rivalry between the Nazi regime and the Soviet Union. Together, these events served as catalysts for the Nazis to intensify their campaign for the establishment of what Hitler described as a "defensive alliance against the red invasion from Moscow."²⁸⁸

Japan was the first nation the Nazis approached for this purpose. Discussions with Japanese authorities began in 1935, initiated by Hitler's Ambassador-at-large, Joachim von Ribbentrop. Around June of that year, Ribbentrop contacted the Japanese military attaché, Hiroshi Oshima, to convey the Nazi regime's interest in forming an alliance with Japan aimed at countering the political influence of the Soviet Union on the global stage. For several months, negotiations stalled. It was not until October 1935 that Oshima and Ribbentrop held a first in-person meeting, after which the Japanese emissary consulted the Imperial General Staff with regards to their position vis-à-vis a collaboration with Nazi Germany.²⁸⁹

²⁸⁸ Moniz de Aragão, "Entrega de Credenciaes Do Ministro Moniz de Aragão."

²⁸⁹ Gerhard L. Weinberg, *Hitler's Foreign Policy: 1933 - 1939 ; the Road to World War II* (New York: Enigma Books, 2010), 267.

Throughout the negotiations, which continued until November 1936, discussions bypassed traditional diplomatic channels. In both Japan and Germany, Foreign Ministers were notably unenthusiastic about an anti-communist pact, fearing it could exacerbate regional tensions in Asia and Europe, respectively. As a result, the negotiations proceeded under the direction of the *Dienststelle Ribbentrop* and the Japanese Imperial Army. This was yet another instance—beyond the issue of German communities abroad—where the conflicts between competing agencies in charge of Nazi foreign policy became evident. Throughout 1936, Ribbentrop continued to stress the urgency of an alliance with Japan, while German Foreign Minister Konstantin von Neurath opposed the pact, arguing that it offered little strategic value for Germany and could jeopardize its relations with the United Kingdom.²⁹⁰

A confluence of circumstances and personal relationships shifted the balance in Ribbentrop's favor. By 1936, Ribbentrop had built a reputation with Hitler as a trustworthy foreign policy advisor. Furthermore, the ratification of the French-Soviet Treaty of Mutual Assistance and the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War reinforced Hitler's belief in the necessity of advancing an international anticommunist alliance. German and Japanese negotiators ultimately agreed to frame the pact as one directed against the Comintern, in an attempt to mitigate potential repercussions in their relations with the Soviet Union. They also agreed Poland and the United Kingdom would be subsequently invited to join the pact. If any contribution from Neurath is to be noted, it would be the deliberate omission of references to Japanese-occupied Manchukuo, a decision intended to avoid jeopardizing ongoing negotiations with China for the acquisition of raw materials.²⁹¹

²⁹⁰ Weinberg, 267.

²⁹¹ For a detailed discussion of the German-Japanese negotiations see: Gerhard L. Weinberg, *Hitler's Foreign Policy: 1933 - 1939 ; the Road to World War II* (New York: Enigma Books, 2010), 267-269.

3.1.1. Engaging the Brazilian Ambassador

In January 1936, in a conversation that followed the ceremony for the presentation of credentials by Moniz de Aragão, Hitler conveyed to the Brazilian Ambassador his desire to form a “global defensive entente” against Moscow.²⁹² By then, Ribbentrop’s conversations with Oshima, although advanced, were maintained in secret. However, rumors already circulated amidst diplomatic circles in Berlin about the ongoing negotiations for an anticommunist alliance between Imperial Japan and the Nazi Regime. Soviet intelligence services had already uncovered the ongoing discussions between Berlin and Tokyo. Between December 1935 and January 1936, Soviet authorities strategically released a series of reports to international news outlets, exposing the emerging Berlin-Tokyo Axis.²⁹³ Their objective was to weaken the international credibility of Hitler’s regime by publicizing evidence of secret negotiations, leveraging the memories of the secret alliance systems that had contributed to the escalation of local tensions into what became World War I.

Some of these articles, published in the French and British press, came to the attention of Moniz de Aragão, who sought confirmation from the German Foreign Office. According to the Brazilian Ambassador, officials at Wilhelmstraße refrained from providing categorical confirmation of negotiations with Japan. Nonetheless, they alluded to their existence, suggesting that it would be beneficial for Brazil to “establish a perfect solidarity, and even a common front, with countries that currently engaged in forming a barrier to the propaganda of the III International across the globe.”²⁹⁴ Furthering a collaboration with Brazil, however, required German institutions to take on

²⁹² Moniz de Aragão, “Entrega de Credenciaes Do Ministro Moniz de Aragão.”

²⁹³ Weinberg, *Hitler’s Foreign Policy*, 268.

²⁹⁴ José Joaquim Moniz de Aragão, “Convenção de Assistencia Entre a Alemanha, a Polonia e o Japão” (Berlin, January 22, 1936), Itamaraty.

a proactive role. Vargas was initially reluctant to provide the Third Reich with information on the activities of international communist militants operating in Brazil beyond those necessary to identify the German nationals imprisoned in the aftermath of the uprising of November 1935. Conversely, as early as February 1936, the Gestapo regularly provided the embassy with intelligence on the activities of communist actors in Brazil, as well as the connections of Brazilian communist militants to their counterparts in Europe.²⁹⁵

Contrasting with the reluctance of Brazilian authorities, the Brazilian Ambassador undoubtedly appreciated the deference extended to him by the Nazi intelligence and police apparatus, thus favoring a closer collaboration with the Nazi regime. In multiple reports submitted to his superiors in Brazil, Moniz de Aragão highlighted the cooperation and goodwill of German authorities in providing information deemed critical to the anticommunist efforts of the South American nation. Particularly regarding the assistance rendered by the Gestapo in identifying Arthur Ewert and Olga Benário, the Brazilian Ambassador praised the thorough efforts of Hitler's secret police. For instance, in the case of Benário, he commended the Gestapo's extensive effort, noting that agents "consulted 25,000 photographs and 60,000 index cards" to precisely establish the identity of the woman arrested alongside Luís Carlos Prestes.²⁹⁶ His praise was often accompanied by recommendations that Brazilian authorities reciprocate the initiatives of Hitler's secret police as means to sustain the strong relations between the Gestapo and the Brazilian Embassy.²⁹⁷ His stance appeared to align with the priorities of Vargas' Justice Ministry and political police, as throughout 1936, they increasingly forwarded files on communist actors active in Brazil to the Embassy in

²⁹⁵ José Joaquim Moniz de Aragão, "A Propaganda Comunista No Brasil" (Berlin, April 25, 1936), Itamaraty; José Joaquim Moniz de Aragão, "A Propaganda Comunista No América Do Sul e Europa" (Berlin, July 15, 1936), Itamaraty.

²⁹⁶ José Joaquim Moniz de Aragão, "A Propaganda Comunista No Brasil" (Berlin, April 24, 1936), Itamaraty.

²⁹⁷ José Joaquim Moniz de Aragão, "Antecedentes de Harry Berger" (Berlin, February 4, 1936), Itamaraty.

Berlin. This effectively converted the Brazilian diplomatic mission in Germany into a central hub for intelligence exchange between Brazilian and German authorities regarding anticommunist matters.

The close ties between the Hitler's secret police and the Brazilian Embassy can be further explained by the personal relationship between Moniz Aragão and the head of German Military Intelligence (Abwehr), Admiral Wilhelm Canaris. In February 1936, Canaris not only facilitated the Brazilian ambassador's visit to Gestapo facilities but also made the German government's counterintelligence services available to the embassy. Canaris offer, relayed to Brazilian authorities by Moniz de Aragão, included the provision of decryption services for documents apprehended by Vargas' political police as well as the disclosure of intelligence on the circulation of communist militants between Europe and South America.²⁹⁸

3.1.2. Learning from the Gestapo

It was also at Canaris's suggestion that plans began to be drafted for a technical visit to Germany by agents of the Vargas' political police. The German admiral initially proposed that these agents accompany the Brazilian delegation attending the Berlin Olympics. In Canaris's view, this arrangement would enable them to personally observe the inner workings of the Gestapo without drawing attention from Soviet agents.²⁹⁹ At that time, however, the authorities in Rio de Janeiro did not pursue the discussions further. The entire focus of Vargas' law enforcement apparatus was still directed toward the investigation and repression against those accused of involvement in the communist uprisings of 1935. Brazilian authorities revisited the issue only in December 1936,

²⁹⁸ José Joaquim Moniz de Aragão, "As Atribuições e Organização Da 'Gestapo'" (Berlin, February 21, 1936), Itamaraty.

²⁹⁹ José Joaquim Moniz de Aragão, "As Atribuições e Organização Da 'Gestapo'" (Berlin, February 21, 1936), Itamaraty.

formally requesting the German Embassy to notify the Foreign Office and the Gestapo of the Brazilian government's intention to send Afonso Miranda Correia, the Deputy Chief of Police of the Federal District, in a technical visit to the German capital.³⁰⁰

The consultations with the German Embassy followed similar discussions with U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt, who had visited Rio de Janeiro the previous month. On that occasion, U.S. officials had the opportunity to tour the facilities of Vargas' political police, where they were shown a collection of documents related to the activities of international communist actors in Brazil, described as “extremely valuable to the United States”.³⁰¹ As a result of the visit, it was agreed that Miranda Correia would travel to the United States, where he would exchange “materials and ideas” with the FBI and the New York Police Department.³⁰²

These discussions were communicated to the German Foreign Office by the German Ambassador to Brazil, Arthur Schmidt-Elskop, who informed his superiors in Germany of Miranda Correia's intention to travel to Germany after his visit to the United States. The German Ambassador characterized Miranda Correia as “emphatically pro-German” and someone who “understands and welcomes our antisemitic stance.” He further noted that a brief visit would suffice for both parties to advance their shared objectives of combating communism and addressing the inflow of immigrants arriving in Brazil from Germany, in particular Jewish individuals.³⁰³

³⁰⁰ Arthur Schmidt-Elskop, “Einladung Des Chefs Der Brasilianischen Politischen Polizei Nach Deutschland” (Berlin, December 10, 1936), File R100747, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts.

³⁰¹ Schmidt-Elskop.

³⁰² Schmidt-Elskop. See also: Elizabeth Cancelli, *O Mundo Da Violência: A Polícia Da Era Vargas* (Brasília, DF: Editora Universidade de Brasília, 1993), 84.

³⁰³ Schmidt-Elskop, “Einladung des Chefs der brasilianischen Politischen Polizei nach Deutschland,” December 10, 1936.

Nonetheless, unlike the visit to the United States, which was of a protocolary nature, Miranda Correia's visit to Germany aimed to deepen the collaboration between the Brazilian and German political police forces. In his memorandum to Wilhelmstraße, Schmidt-Elskop emphasized the desire of the Brazilian official “not to be regarded merely as a visitor.”³⁰⁴ In the words of the German Ambassador:

“(…) the Delegacia Especial has a great admiration for the work of the German Secret State Police and considers cooperation with our authorities to be urgently necessary, (...) Captain Miranda Correa attaches the utmost importance to being invited to visit the German Secret State Police.”³⁰⁵

The response to Miranda Correia’s request arrived a few weeks later in the form of a Gestapo memorandum addressed to the German Foreign Office. In the document, Gestapo officials commended the ongoing collaboration between German and Brazilian authorities and suggested that the time might be opportune for formalizing an agreement with Brazil regarding the joint efforts to combat communism.³⁰⁶ The proposed terms were similar to agreements concluded by the Third Reich with other nations and included:

- “1) The exchange of general experience between the two police forces with regards to communism, anarchism and other anti-state endeavors.
- 2) The mutual provision of material and evidence with regards to communism, anarchism and other anti-state activities, as well as associations whose surveillance or dissolution appears desirable in the mutual interest.
- 3) Mutual support in the elucidation of the activities and intentions of communist-anarchist and other anti-state centers outside Brazil and Germany directed against the two countries and mutual information on the results of the investigation work.

³⁰⁴ Schmidt-Elskop.

³⁰⁵ Schmidt-Elskop.

³⁰⁶ Geheime Staatspolizei, “Zusammenarbeit Zwischen Der Brasilianischen Und Der Deutschen Polizei” (Berlin, December 23, 1936), File R27196, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts.

4)Accepting suggestions for the implementation of police enforcement measures against communists, anarchists and other state-sponsored elements”³⁰⁷

These instructions were later remitted to the German Embassy in Rio de Janeiro accompanied by a formal invitation from Heinrich Himmler, then occupying the position of Chief of the German Police, for Miranda Correia to visit the Gestapo facilities in the German capital.³⁰⁸

The Brazilian captain arrived in Germany aboard the Hindenburg airship in late March 1937 and remained in the German capital until April 15. During this period, Miranda Correia engaged in the private study of Nazi Germany’s law enforcement apparatus, later participating in a formal program organized by Vicco von Bülow-Schwante, Chief of Protocol of the German Foreign Office. The program included tours of Gestapo facilities and the Police Academy in Berlin, where Miranda Correia was introduced to the “systems, methods and practices” employed by the German law enforcement apparatus in their anticommunist operations. Reports of the visit emphasize the Brazilian captain was granted access to intelligence files related to German espionage and counter-espionage operations, as well as to facilities dedicated to the production of forged documents, including passports, photographs, ink, and stamps.³⁰⁹

The attention afforded to Miranda Correia by the German authorities was commended by the Brazilian ambassador, who attended some of the events organized by the German Chief of Protocol. Throughout the visit, an official interpreter was made available to Miranda Correia at the expense of the German government to facilitate the communication with the German agents. Additionally, on April 12, following the conclusion of the visit, a luncheon was organized in his

³⁰⁷ Geheime Staatspolizei.

³⁰⁸ Vicco von Bülow-Schwante, “Brief an Das Geheime Staatpolizeiamt” (Berlin, December 31, 1936), File R100747, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts.

³⁰⁹ José Joaquim Moniz de Aragão, “Visita Capitão Miranda Corrêa” (Berlin, April 15, 1937), Itamaraty.

honor, during which the Brazilian captain was awarded the Medal of Honor of the German Red Cross. The event was attended by Bülow-Schwante, General Kurt Daluege, as well as the Head of the *Auslandsorganisation*, Wilhelm Bohle, and the Chief of the *Sicherheitspolizei*, Reinhard Heydrich.

The German authorities anticipated that Miranda Correia's visit would provide an opportunity to formalize the agreements proposed by the Gestapo a few months prior. At the time, discussions were centered on the establishment of a judicial cooperation agreement. Nonetheless, by the time of Miranda Correia's arrival in Germany, the authorities of Brazil and Germany had not yet agreed on the terms of the accord.

At the core of the proposal was the cooperation on matters of criminal law, particularly the exchange of information on criminal convictions and the mutual recognition and enforcement of court rulings.³¹⁰ These provisions proved less controversial, as similar collaborative initiatives had already been undertaken on a case-by-case basis as part of the investigations and extradition proceedings of German nationals accused of involvement in the 1935 communist uprisings in Brazil.³¹¹ However, disagreements over the scope of the judicial collaboration hindered the progress of negotiations. A proposal submitted by Brazil included provisions addressing civil and commercial law, which were met with reservations by the Reich Ministry of Justice. While the leadership of Hitler's ministry did not object in principle to entering into agreements with Brazil on civil and commercial legal matters, their official position was that said agreements should be

³¹⁰ Auswärtiges Amt, "Brief an Den Reichsminister Der Justiz" (Berlin, March 8, 1937), Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts.

³¹¹ See previous chapter.

negotiated separately.³¹² Moreover, the Reich Ministry of Justice considered it imperative that the legal cooperation agreement include provisions on extradition akin to those enshrined in the German law, a proposal that the Brazilian government had already rejected.³¹³

3.1.3. Nazi Anticommunist Conferences and the Anticommunist Exhibition

Despite the breakdown of negotiations, the Third Reich remained resolute in its efforts to secure Brazil as a partner in its international campaign against communism. The Ministry of Propaganda, through its *Referat Anti-Komintern*, made efforts to maintain cordial relations with the Brazilian embassy, with the Brazilian diplomatic mission being one of the guests invited to participate in the first anti-communist congress scheduled for October 1937. This would not be the first instance of the Brazilian diplomatic mission participating in an event of this kind. In November 1936, mere weeks prior to the signing of the Anti-Comintern Pact between Germany and Japan, representatives of the Brazilian embassy participated as observers in the 1st Secret International Anticommunist Conference, held in the city of Feldafing.

A total of eighteen delegations participated in the conference in Feldafing, with only three Latin American countries represented: Argentina, Bolivia and Brazil. Among the nations of Europe, England, France, and Czechoslovakia were not invited to the event due to their perceived close ties with the Soviet Union.³¹⁴ The conference began on November 4, with some of the delegations present delivering reports on the state of communist activities in their respective countries.

³¹² Reichsjustizministerium, "Rechtshilfeverträge mit Brasilien" (Berlin, April 26, 1937), Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts; German Embassy in Rio de Janeiro, "Aide-Mémoire" (Rio de Janeiro, July 22, 1937), Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts.

³¹³ See previous chapter.

³¹⁴ José Joaquim Moniz de Aragão, "Primeira Conferencia Internacional Secreta Anti-Comunista" (Berlin, November 21, 1936), Itamaraty.

Representing Germany, the chair of the *Anti-Komintern*, Dr. Adolf Ehrh, opened the proceedings by articulating the Nazi stance on the critical importance of an international anticommunist alliance. Ehrh asserted that a complete alignment existed between the Comintern, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, and the Russian government, all of which shared the common objective of establishing a “global communist regime and the universal dictatorship of the Soviets.”³¹⁵ He cited the situation in Spain as an example, exhorting those present to unite in the struggle against what he described as “red imperialism”.³¹⁶ Ehrh's speech was followed by remarks from the representatives of Italy and Spain, whose speeches echoed the arguments presented by the German delegate. Among the Latin American delegations, only Bolivia provided a report, emphasizing the role of local law enforcement institutions in suppressing communism within the country.³¹⁷

The presentation of the reports was followed by a discussion deemed most significant by the Brazilian diplomats, particularly concerning the methods and forms of international cooperation in the campaign against communism. This segment addressed the issues of the press, radio broadcasting, literature, information exchange, and scientific research, with delegated exchanging experiences and proposals on how to thwart the Comintern's influence. As a result of these discussions, the participating delegations agreed to intensify the exchange of news and information aimed at discrediting the Comintern, as well as the individuals and movements associated with it. They also resolved to establish a news agency in Geneva under the direction of the International Anticommunist Entente, which, beginning in 1937, published the *Revue Anticommuniste*. Further measures agreed upon during the conference included the allocation of radio slots dedicated to

³¹⁵ Moniz de Aragão.

³¹⁶ Moniz de Aragão.

³¹⁷ Moniz de Aragão.

anticommunist programing and the exchange of anticommunist films among participating countries.³¹⁸

The organization of public exhibitions featuring materials that portrayed communism in a negative light was also a topic of discussion among the participants of the secret anticommunist conference. The German delegate, Dr. Ehrt, argued for the strategic value and effectiveness of these exhibitions in exposing the populace to anticommunist propaganda. His claims were echoed by the delegates from Switzerland and Sweden, countries that also had experimented with organizing anticommunist exhibitions. To further substantiate the argument, a visit to the ongoing anticommunist exhibition in Munich—one of several such exhibitions organized by the Nazis between 1936 and 1939—was included into the conference program.

The visit left a profound impression on the Brazilian delegate, diplomat Glauco Ferreira de Souza, who reported being deeply affected by "the macabre nature of the exhibits illustrating the horrors of Bolshevism."³¹⁹ He also expressed satisfaction in noting that the exhibition featured images from the 1935 communist uprisings in Brazil, which had been supplied by the Brazilian government. Intensifying the exchange of photographs, statistics and films "exposing the horrors of bolshevism" was one of the stated objectives of the conference in Feldafing, and discussions rapidly progressed the debate of logistical and financial considerations of replicating Nazi exhibitions in interested countries.

Amidst discussions, Dr. Alfred Gielen, a senior official of the *Referat Anti-Komintern*, approached the Brazilian delegate with the offer to assist Brazilian authorities in replicating Nazi

³¹⁸ Moniz de Aragão.

³¹⁹ Moniz de Aragão.

anticommunist exhibitions. The Nazi official estimated the cost of reproducing the photographs and materials at 800 Reichsmark and assured his full commitment to promptly providing the materials to the Brazilian authorities. The Brazilian diplomats in Berlin viewed the offer as a promising opportunity. They believed that collaboration with the Anti-Komintern would not only bolster the fight against communism domestically but also solidify Brazil's position as a key player in the international anticommunist campaign in the Americas.³²⁰ By September 1937, however, the Embassy had yet to receive a final response from the Foreign Ministry in Rio de Janeiro.³²¹ The reluctance, in this instance, was not rooted in a lack of interest from Brazilian authorities but was largely driven by a focus on domestic affairs, notably the forthcoming 1938 elections and the political unrest that eventually resulted in Vargas' Estado Novo dictatorship.

3.2. Estado Novo, Anticommunism and the Third Reich

Throughout much of 1937, a sense of normalcy appeared to have returned to Brazilian politics after more than a year of successive disruptions to the constitutional order, ostensibly justified by the fight against communism. Candidates were beginning preparations for the impending electoral campaign, signaling to observers that the elections scheduled for January 1938 would take place as expected. However, the revelation of an alleged new communist plan to seize power in Brazil once again plunged the country into institutional disarray. Reports on the so-called "Cohen Plan" emerged on the evening of September 29, 1937, when Vargas' Minister of War addressed the nation during the government's daily radio program, *Hora do Brasil*, urging Congress to approve a new

³²⁰ Moniz de Aragão.

³²¹ José Joaquim Moniz de Aragão, "Exposição Anti-Comunista de Nuremberg" (Berlin, September 24, 1937), Itamaraty.

national emergency decree.³²² On the following day, the newspaper *Jornal do Commercio* published alleged excerpts from the document, supplied by the Ministry of War, which included instructions for organizing strikes, committing arson against public buildings, and mobilizing a revolutionary army.³²³

After Vargas stepped down from power, it was revealed that the “Cohen Plan” was a forgery. Its authorship is attributed to Army Captain Olímpio Mourão Filho, who at the time also served as head of the secret service for the fascist *Ação Integralista Brasileira* (AIB).³²⁴ The name selected for the plan was indicative of the underlying antisemitism permeating the AIB, which at the time was one of the key forces advocating for Vargas's shift toward autocratic rule. As historian Jeffrey Lesser recounts, the document was originally signed with the name of Hungarian communist leader Béla Kun, who was mockingly referred to as Béla Cohen by Integralist leaders, a reference to his Jewish heritage.³²⁵

For Vargas and his supporters within the Brazilian military, however, the embedded antisemitism in the alleged plan was a marginal concern. Following the events of 1935, communism had proved far more effective in instigating fear amidst Brazilian public opinion, converting the anticommunist nature of the Cohen Plan into the ideal instrument for legitimizing a new rupture with the constitutional order. Therefore, the fact that the repression had successfully imprisoned

³²² Jeffrey Lesser, *Welcoming the Undesirables: Brazil and the Jewish Question* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2023), 97.

³²³ “O Programma Comunista Para o Brasil,” *Jornal Do Commercio*, September 30, 1937, Hemeroteca Digital.

³²⁴ Helio Martins, “Implantação Do Estado Novo e Revolta Integralista,” *Revista Naigator* 8, no. 16 (2012): 140.

³²⁵ Jeffrey Lesser, *Welcoming the Undesirables: Brazil and the Jewish Question* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2023), 97.

key leaders and dismantled the principal communist organizations capable of significant mobilization in the aftermath of the 1935 uprisings held little relevance to the conspirators.

By the time the document was made public, preparations for the coup d'état were already well underway. In August 1937, Mourão Filho brought the Cohen Plan to the attention of Admiral Álvaro Guilherme Mariante and the Chief of the Army General Staff, General Pedro Aurélio de Góis Monteiro. Subsequently, Mariante and Góis Monteiro circulated the document within military circles, while concealing its origins as a forgery—a fact known only to a select few within the high command of the Brazilian armed forces.³²⁶ Vargas, while not made aware of the document until days before its release to the public, was already conspiring with the military leadership to secure his continued hold on power. Their plan consisted of using the fabricated communist conspiracy to pressure the Brazilian Congress into reinstating the state of war, thereby granting Vargas the exceptional powers needed to quell his opposition. The state of war was approved by Congress on October 1, and invoking its provisions, Vargas ordered the dissolution of Congress on November 10, thus inaugurating the authoritarian regime known as *Estado Novo*.

3.2.1. Nazi Germany Welcomes the Estado Novo

The authoritarian turn orchestrated by Vargas and his allies was met with acclaim in Hitler's Germany. The *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger*, for instance, published an article praising the authoritarian shift in Brazil and commending Vargas for his “bloodless national revolution.”³²⁷ The Berlin

³²⁶ Martins, “Implantação Do Estado Novo e Revolta Integralista,” 140.

³²⁷ “Brasilien Autoritär: Unblutige Nationale Revolution in Südamerika,” *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger*, November 13, 1937. Part of the news clippings attached to José Joaquim Moniz de Aragão, “A Situação Política Interna Do Brasil” (Berlin, November 18, 1937), Itamaraty.

newspaper underscored the anticommunist nature of the coup led by Vargas, depicting it as a significant setback to Comintern ambitions in South America.

“Since he (Vargas) can rely on the army and the police, he can hope that the coup d'état will continue to be carried out without serious unrest, so that he can successfully complete his reconstruction work for the best of Brazil, although communism will probably mobilize everything to prevent him from doing so; because in Moscow it is a serious disappointment that this country (Brazil), which they believe they have already half conquered, is now turning away from them and ceding to an authoritarian state leadership.”³²⁸

In a similar vein, The *Leipziger Tageszeitung* ran the headline: "President Vargas Saves Brazil: The New Constitution is Proclaimed / Communism is Eradicated."³²⁹ The article praised the attitude of Vargas' government while observing that the emergence of an authoritarian regime in Brazil had raised concerns in Washington.

“It is clear that the success of the ‘total(itarian) system’ in South America would result in a decisive shift in world politics. Above all, one is eager to see what attitude the United States will take to such a turn of events, as the same question that has preoccupied Europe for several years now arises in the Americas.”³³⁰

Such comments were in some instances accompanied by the reproduction of a note circulated by the Brazilian Embassy explaining the new political situation in Brazil. The document, reflecting the official narrative of the Estado Novo regime, underscored the perceived shortcomings of the 1934 Constitution, particularly its limitations on executive power. It asserted that “this fundamental flaw of the 1934 Constitution became even more pronounced due to the need to

³²⁸ “Brasilien Autoritär: Unblutige Nationale Revolution in Südamerika,” *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger*, November 13, 1937. Part of the news clippings attached to José Joaquim Moniz de Aragão, “A Situação Política Interna Do Brasil” (Berlin, November 18, 1937), Itamaraty.

³²⁹ “Präsident Vargas Rettet Brasilien: Die neue Verfassung verkündet / Der Kommunismus Wird Ausgerottet,” *Leipziger Tageszeitung*, November 12, 1937. Also included in the news clippings from José Joaquim Moniz de Aragão, “A Situação Política Interna Do Brasil” (Berlin, November 18, 1937), Itamaraty.

³³⁰ “Präsident Vargas Rettet Brasilien: Die neue Verfassung verkündet / Der Kommunismus Wird Ausgerottet,” *Leipziger Tageszeitung*, November 12, 1937. Also included in the news clippings from José Joaquim Moniz de Aragão, “A Situação Política Interna Do Brasil” (Berlin, November 18, 1937), Itamaraty. Similar reports appeared in: “Brasilien's Neue Verfassung,” *Koelnische Zeitung*, November 12, 1937.

combat foreign ideologies that criminally sought to expand worldwide and, here in Brazil, attempted to violently overthrow public order.”³³¹

The note was part of a coordinated diplomatic effort to mitigate potential repercussions of Vargas' authoritarian turn on Brazil's foreign relations. In the days following the establishment of the new regime, Brazilian diplomats actively engaged with host country authorities to reassure them of Brazil's adherence to its previously established international obligations. In this regard, Moniz de Aragão faced a notably less challenging task than his colleagues heading Brazilian diplomatic missions in London, Paris, or Washington. During his consultation with the Brazilian diplomat, Hans Georg von Mackensen, Secretary of State of the German Foreign Office, speaking on behalf of Minister von Neurath, congratulated the Brazilian government on the chosen course of action. Mackensen also conveyed his solidarity with the Brazilian government in response to the criticism it had been receiving following the announcement of the *Estado Novo*, particularly from the French press, which linked the Brazilian regime to fascism and attributed Vargas' coup to German interference.³³²

Mackensen's remarks to Moniz de Aragão were further articulated on November 27, 1937, in an article published in the *Politische und Diplomatische Korrespondenz*, a periodical edited by the press service at Wilhelmstrasse. The article invoked the example of Spain to support the Brazilian government's argument about the imminent communist threat looming over South America. Brazil was portrayed as the latest target of the “systemic subversion work” orchestrated by international

³³¹ “Die Gründe Für Den Staatsstreich,” *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger*, November 13, 1937; “Die Lage in Brasilien,” *Völkischer Beobachter*, November 14, 1937.

³³² Moniz de Aragão, “A Situação Política Interna Do Brasil.”

communism, a situation equated to that of Spain prior to the coup led by Franco's nationalists.³³³

Much like Franco, Vargas was depicted in the article as a savior, praised for his timely recognition of the alleged threat posed by the Comintern to Brazil's political stability.³³⁴

Beyond the praise for the Brazilian president, the article also reflects Germany's diplomatic efforts to dispel rumors in the international press regarding alleged Nazi interference in Vargas' coup. The article emphasized Vargas' political independence, portraying the developments in Brazil as the exclusive outcome of the country's unique circumstances and commitment to safeguarding its sovereignty.

“The independence of Brazil's domestic policy, as so clearly reflected in President Vargas' initiatives, offers — and there can be no doubt about this — the assurance that in the country's overall political direction, particularly in foreign policy, the Head of State's decisions will always be dictated by the interests of the nation, rather than by a desire to please or antagonize foreign powers.”³³⁵

Furthermore, the article sought to rebuke criticisms that drew parallels between Vargas' political attitudes and those of fascist-inspired regimes in Europe. Politics, it argued, “should be guided solely by the interests of the nation itself and cannot be executed according to external schemas and formulas,” suggesting that the actions and motivations of Vargas and his allies bore little resemblance to the political practices of the Third Reich.³³⁶

The Third Reich, in fact, had no direct participation in the coup carried out by Vargas and his associates. Nevertheless, the narrative advanced by Wilhelmstrasse understates Nazi Germany's contribution to the anticommunist campaign conducted by the Brazilian government. By

³³³ Article attached to José Joaquim Moniz de Aragão, “Artigo Da Correspondencia Diplomatica e Politica Sobre a Politica Brasileira” (Berlin, November 30, 1937), Itamaraty.

³³⁴ Moniz de Aragão.

³³⁵ Moniz de Aragão.

³³⁶ Moniz de Aragão.

November 1937, cooperation on anticommunist intelligence was firmly established, and preliminary steps toward technical collaboration between the political police forces of Brazil and Germany were already in progress. In addition, the Nazi rhetoric regarding the Brazilian regime concealed Hitler's broader geopolitical interest in the establishment of an autocratic ally in South America. An alliance with Brazil could serve as a strategic platform for extending Germany's commercial and cultural influence in the region, while also curbing U.S. influence in an area regarded by Washington as part of its sphere of influence.³³⁷ From the German perspective, circumstances were particularly favorable, as the regime change in Brazil appeared to partially fulfill these strategic objectives without requiring direct intervention from Berlin—a scenario deemed preferable for avoiding further deterioration in relations between Nazi Germany and the United States.

Driven by the prospect of a closer partnership with the South American nation, discussions regarding the potential for Brazil's accession to the Anti-Comintern Pact quickly gained momentum within the German Foreign Office.³³⁸ Since the signature of the pact in 1936, German authorities had indicated to Brazilian diplomats that accession to the German-Italian-Japanese agreement was possible and open to interested nations. Nonetheless, the Brazilian government had not yet issued a formal statement nor indicated a position on the prospect of joining the Anti-Comintern Pact.

German diplomats anticipated that the authoritarian, fascist-inspired orientation of the new regime would alter this state of affairs. This expectation was reinforced by the nationalist and corporatist

³³⁷ See report attached to Moniz de Aragão, "Primeira Conferencia Internacional Secreta Anti-Comunista."

³³⁸ "Memorandum to Reich Minister von Neurath Recomening Brazil's Ascession to the Anti-Comintern Pact" (Berlin, November 19, 1937), File R99522, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts.

character of the constitution promulgated by Vargas in 1937, as well as by the rapprochement between the new regime and the integralists – with the latter fueled further by rumors that the leader of the AIB, Plínio Salgado, would be appointed as Minister of Education in the new cabinet.³³⁹ Wilhelmstrasse issued directives to the German embassy in Rio de Janeiro, instructing it to convey to the Brazilian government Germany's intention to incorporate Brazil into the Berlin-Rome-Tokyo anticommunist alliance.

The responsibility for formally extending the invitation for Brazil to join the Anti-Comintern Pact was assigned to Karl Ritter, the newly appointed German ambassador to Brazil. Prior to his relocation to Rio de Janeiro, Ritter, a career diplomat specializing in economic affairs, had been involved in promoting Germany's trade relations with the South American nation, serving as one of the architects of the 1936 trade agreement between the two countries. Despite Ritter's efforts and experience, the negotiations did not unfold as anticipated by Reich diplomatic circles. Upon consultation, the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs informed the German diplomat that it had no intention of formalizing its accession to the Anti-Comintern Pact.³⁴⁰ In later discussions, Brazilian authorities clarified that their decision was not rooted in a rejection of the pact's relevance to the country, but rather in concerns that accession could undermine their cordial relations with the United States.³⁴¹

Despite declining the formal offer to join the Anti-Comintern Pact, the Brazilian government, particularly the Ministry of Justice, expressed an interest in maintaining informal collaboration

³³⁹ On the support of the AIB to the Estado Novo, see: Leandro Pereira Gonçalves and Odilon Caldeira Neto, *O fascismo em camisas verdes: do integralismo ao neointegralismo*, 1ª ed (Rio de Janeiro: FGV Editora, 2021), 57.

³⁴⁰ Politische Abteilung IX, "Response to Consultation from Referat D Regarding the Brazilian Accession to the Anti-Comintern Pact" (Berlin, November 30, 1937), File R99522, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts.

³⁴¹ Otto Oehlke, "Memorandum an Minister Goebbels" (Berlin, January 29, 1938), File R99522, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts.

with the Third Reich for anticommunist initiatives. In early December 1937, Minister Francisco Campos contacted the German Embassy in Rio de Janeiro to inquire about the possibility of obtaining informal assistance from the Reich in organizing an anticommunist exhibition similar to those previously held in Germany.³⁴² The Brazilian Minister of Justice allocated a budget of 5,000 to 7,000 Reichsmarks, which was equivalent to slightly over 2,000 U.S. dollars at the time, to cover the costs associated with the production and shipment of the propaganda materials needed for the exhibition.³⁴³

A response from the Reich Ministry of Propaganda was dispatched in January 1938, expressing satisfaction with the receipt of the Brazilian minister's request. The document, relayed through Ambassador Ritter, informed Brazilian authorities that the ProMi was prepared to comply with Campos's request, although it emphasized that the exhibition made available to Brazil would be smaller in scope than the anti-Bolshevist exhibitions held in Germany.

The initial expectation was that the materials for the anti-Bolshevist exhibition would be dispatched to Brazil in February. However, they did not leave Europe until early March, departing from Naples aboard the steamer *Neptunia* and arriving in Rio de Janeiro on March 17, 1938.³⁴⁴ The organization of the exhibition in Brazil was eagerly anticipated by the Nazi Ministry of Propaganda. A month after the materials arrived in Brazil, the ProMi requested a report from the German Embassy in Rio de Janeiro detailing the progress of the exhibition, along with photographs

³⁴² Karl Ritter, "Secret Memorandum on the German-Brazilian Cooperation in the Struggle against the Comintern" (Berlin, December 23, 1937), File R27196, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts.

³⁴³ Ritter.

³⁴⁴ Hinrichs, "Telegram to the German Embassy in Rio de Janeiro" (Berlin, March 2, 1938), Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts.

to be circulated in the German press.³⁴⁵ However, by that time, the political circumstances in Brazil had already undergone significant changes, and relations between Brazil and Germany had deteriorated dramatically. Despite the unfavorable circumstances, Campos indicated to the German Embassy in June that the exhibition would be held shortly. Nonetheless, the further escalation of the diplomatic tensions between Brazil and Germany ultimately prevented it from ever being opened to the public.

3.2.2. Brazilian Foreign Policy: Responding to Roosevelt's Pan-Americanism

The more cautious approach of Brazilian diplomacy toward its relations with Germany coincided with the adoption of a more assertive stance by the United States in its engagement with Latin America. Since taking office in 1933, President Franklin D. Roosevelt committed to a “Good Neighbor Policy,” later enshrined in the Montevideo Convention, which emphasized U.S. non-interference in the domestic affairs of other American nations.³⁴⁶ Roosevelt’s policy marked a departure from the Monroe Doctrine, which had defined U.S. relations with Latin America during the first decades of the 20th century. Instead, it promoted a foreign policy aimed at strengthening commercial ties and forging instruments of mutual assistance among the nations of the Western Hemisphere.

More broadly, the adoption of this new foreign policy orientation towards Latin America was accompanied by an increasingly isolationist stance on the part of the U.S. Congress. In particular, lawmakers sought to avoid U.S. involvement in foreign conflicts, resulting in a less proactive U.S.

³⁴⁵ Reichsministerium für Volksaufklärung und Propaganda, “Schnellbrief: Antikommunistische Ausstellung in Brasilien” (Berlin, March 2, 1938), File R99522, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts.

³⁴⁶ Charles I. Bevans, ed., “Convention on Rights and Duties of States (Inter-American); December 26, 1933,” in *Treaties and Other International Agreements of the United States of America, 1776-1949* (Washington, D.C: Government Printing Office, 1969), https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/intam03.asp.

engagement with international affairs. Exemplify this stance the passage of the Neutrality Act in August 1935 and the subsequent refusal to intervene on either side of the Spanish Civil War in 1936.³⁴⁷

A less assertive U.S. foreign policy provided Latin American nations with greater flexibility to explore alternative solutions for addressing the issues brought about by the Great Depression. Coupled with the overall decline in U.S. participation in international trade, the new orientation of Roosevelt's foreign policy contributed to a diminished perception among governments in the region of the diplomatic risk involved in occasionally antagonizing Washington's interests. In Chile, for instance, the early 1930s were marked by a nationalist shift in economic policy. To mitigate the effects of the Great Depression, Chilean authorities resorted to suspending external debt payments, freezing of dollar-denominated funds, establishing currency controls, and negotiating compensation treaties with European countries, measures that conflicted with the liberalizing agenda promoted by the United States.³⁴⁸ In Argentina, the widening rift with the United States manifested in the position taken by the Argentine delegation at the International Conference of American States held in Montevideo in 1933. In contrast to the hemispheric alliance promoted by the United States, Argentina's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Carlos Saavedra Lamas,

³⁴⁷ "Neutrality Act," Public Resolution 67, 49 Stat. 1081 (1935), 1081, <https://legislink.org/us/stat-49-1081>.

³⁴⁸ Joaquín Fernando, "La política exterior chilena durante Entreguerras: adaptación, crisis, nuevo camino," in *Tiempos convulsos: Chile en el periodo de entreguerras*, ed. Juan Luis Carrellán Ruiz (Santiago de Chile: Historia Chilena, 2022), 108.

advocated for Latin American countries to adopt a universalist stance, anchored in the principles of the League of Nations.³⁴⁹

In the case of Brazil, the more flexible stance of U.S. diplomacy enabled the Vargas administration to respond to the challenges posed by the Great Depression by diversifying both its portfolio of produced commodities—by then heavily reliant on the coffee exports—as well as its trade and diplomatic partnerships. It was within this context of seeking to reduce its reliance on the United States, that Brazil pursued closer trade and diplomatic relations with Nazi Germany. The analysis presented thus far indicates that neither Vargas nor Brazilian diplomatic circles viewed the rapprochement with the Third Reich and the preservation of favorable relations with the United States as mutually exclusive. On the contrary, Brazilian authorities sought a gradual approach in strengthening ties with Hitler's regime in order to mitigate the risk of a strong reaction from Washington. In the absence of a forceful response from U.S. diplomacy, the Vargas administration moved forward with finalizing a compensation trade deal and expanding Brazil's intelligence cooperation with the Third Reich during the period from 1934 to 1937.

Nonetheless, concerns over the growing influence of Nazi-Fascism in the Western Hemisphere prompted a shift in stance by the Roosevelt administration. Domestically, the House of Representatives established the Special Committee on Un-American Activities, chaired by congressmen John McCormack and Samuel Dickstein. The McCormack-Dickstein committee succeeded a similar initiative established in 1930, tasked with investigating the infiltration of

³⁴⁹ Mauricio Rubilar Luengo and Estefanía Sáez Matamala, "Conferencia Interamericana de la Consolidación de la Paz en Buenos Aires (1936): la actitud de Chile y Argentina en el contexto de la política del 'Buen Vecino' de F.D. Roosevelt," in *Chile y su política exterior: trance y tránsito desde la Gran Guerra a la Guerra Fría (1914-1964)*, ed. Claudio Andrés Tapia Figueroa and Mauricio Rubilar Luengo, Primera edición (Santiago, Chile: Ariadna Ediciones, 2023), 203–4.

ideologies and propaganda considered subversive by U.S. authorities. Unlike its predecessors, however, the new committee placed less emphasis on the spread of communism, focusing instead on individuals and organizations suspected of promoting Nazi and Fascist ideologies.³⁵⁰

The findings of the McCormack-Dickstein Committee concerning the activities of Nazi-sympathizing groups within the United States provided a platform for the Roosevelt administration to adopt a foreign policy for Latin America focused on containing the influence of Nazi-fascism in the region. Roosevelt hinted at this policy shift as early as January 1936, during his annual message to Congress. In the words of the U.S. President:

“Among the Nations of the great Western Hemisphere the policy of the good neighbor has happily prevailed. (...) The rest of the world—Ah! there is the rub. With much regret I should be compelled to devote the greater part to world affairs. Since the summer of that same year of 1933, the temper and the purposes of the rulers of many of the great populations in Europe and in Asia have not pointed the way either to peace or to good-will among men. Not only have peace and good-will among men grown more remote in those areas of the earth during this period, but a point has been reached where the people of the Americas must take cognizance of growing ill-will, of marked trends toward aggression, of increasing armaments, of shortening tempers—a situation which has in it many of the elements that lead to the tragedy of general war.”

Roosevelt reaffirmed this stance at an address to the Brazilian Congress, delivered during a stopover in Rio de Janeiro while en route to Buenos Aires for the Inter-American Conference for the Maintenance of Peace. Roosevelt’s criticisms of Nazi-Fascism were conveyed through the defense of the democratic values that, he argued, unified the American nations.

“Your first concern, like ours, is peace, for we know that war destroys not only human lives and human happiness but destroys as well the ideals of individual liberty and of the democratic form of representative government, which is the goal of all the American Republics.”³⁵¹

³⁵⁰ See: Jacobsen and Smith, *The Nazi Party and the German Foreign Office*, 58.

³⁵¹ Franklin D. Roosevelt, “Address before a Joint Session of the National Congress and the Supreme Court of Brazil at Rio de Janeiro,” The American Presidency Project, November 27, 1936, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/address-before-joint-session-the-national-congress-and-the-supreme-court-brazil-rio-de>.

The U.S. president continued by contrasting the desire for peace prevalent among nations in the Western Hemisphere with the belligerent stance observed on other continents, stating that conflicts of interest between American States “cannot be called serious or difficult of solution when compared with the deeply rooted hates of other continents.”³⁵² Without explicitly referencing Germany or Italy, Roosevelt urged the Brazilian congressmen to reject “the grim picture of armed camps and threats of conflict” present in other parts of the world, advocating instead for a commitment to “contributing steadily and, above all, generously to the advance of well-being, culture, and civilization” in the Western Hemisphere.³⁵³

At the Inter-American Conference held in Buenos Aires on December 1, 1936, the defense of democracy and individual liberties was, once again, the focal point of Roosevelt's address.

“First, it is our duty by every honorable means to prevent any future war among ourselves. This can best be done through the strengthening of the processes of constitutional democratic government; by making these processes conform to the modern need for unity and efficiency and, at the same time, preserving the individual liberties of our citizens.”³⁵⁴

Building on this premise, the U.S. President concluded that “it is no accident that attempts to be self-sufficient have led to failing standards for their people and to an ever-increasing loss of democratic ideals in a mad race to pile armament on armament.”³⁵⁵

This statement can be regarded as a clear reference to Italy's recent campaigns in Ethiopia and Germany's rearmament policy, manifested in the occupation of the Rhineland and the Nazi support for the nationalists in Spain. It was certainly interpreted in this manner by press and diplomatic

³⁵² Roosevelt.

³⁵³ Roosevelt.

³⁵⁴ Franklin D. Roosevelt, “Address before the Inter-American Conference for the Maintenance of Peace, Buenos Aires, Argentina,” The American Presidency Project, December 1, 1936, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/address-before-the-inter-american-conference-for-the-maintenance-peace-buenos-aires>.

³⁵⁵ Roosevelt.

circles aligned with the regimes in Rome and Berlin. The fascist journalist Virginio Gayda, editor of the *Il Giornale d'Italia*, was among the prominent voices who denounced Roosevelt's association between peace and democracy as deceitful. According to Gayda, "the wealth amassed by American Democracy was attained with wars of expansion and conquest during which they exterminated all native races."³⁵⁶ He went as far as to argue that "Roosevelt's attempt at American intervention in European affairs" established a precedent for analogous actions by European powers.³⁵⁷

Gayda's articles ultimately provided a foundation for similar criticisms of Roosevelt's speech by the German press, although these appeared more restrained and sparser. In this regard, the Berliner *Börsen-Zeitung* is perhaps a notable exception. The Berlin daily responded to the U.S. President's speech by arguing that Germans were well acquainted with democracy but had yet to experience its benefits.

"It (democracy) brought us neither a better and fairer civilization and education, nor greater security for our existence, nor an increase in well-being, nor a reduction in armaments, nor, ultimately, the contributions of honest and reasonable international justice."³⁵⁸

Echoing views previously articulated by figures such as Hitler, Goebbels, and Rosenberg, the article dismisses the democratic virtues outlined by Roosevelt, contending that democracy was a regime imposed on Germany after the First World War, becoming a symbol of the reconciliation process proposed by President Woodrow Wilson that remained unrealized.³⁵⁹

³⁵⁶ "UNITED STATES: In a Shoe Store," *Time*, January 13, 1936, The TIME Magazine Vault, <https://time.com/archive/6754860/united-states-in-a-shoe-store/>.

³⁵⁷ "UNITED STATES: In a Shoe Store."

³⁵⁸ Article transcribed in: José Joaquim Moniz de Aragão, "O Discurso de Presidente Roosevelt e Sua Repercussão Na Alemanha" (Berlin, December 11, 1936), Itamaraty.

³⁵⁹ Article transcribed in: Moniz de Aragão.

The tone adopted by the Berlin newspaper was not overtly endorsed by the German Foreign Office. Wilhelmstrasse certainly shared the prevailing interpretation in the German and Italian press, that depicted Roosevelt's speech as a condemnation of the regimes in Berlin and Rome. However, the potential advantages of a rebuttal did not appear to outweigh the risks associated with escalating tensions with the United States at that time. Despite the lack of a public response from German diplomats, it became evident after Roosevelt's speech in Buenos Aires that South America, and consequently Brazil, had become a battleground for the competing interests of Berlin and Washington.

By 1937, the political conditions in Brazil seemed to be evolving to Germany's advantage. The elevation of diplomatic missions to the status of embassies, the signing of the trade agreement, and the collaboration in suppressing communism all pointed to a growing alignment between the regimes of Hitler and Vargas. Within this context, the Roosevelt administration sought to counter the German-Brazilian rapprochement by pledging to increase U.S. participation in trade with Brazil. As a counterpart, the expectation was for the Brazilian government to limit exports conducted via the compensation mechanisms defined in the trade agreement with Germany.³⁶⁰ In addition, the U.S. government committed to supplying Brazil with six destroyers slated for decommissioning by the American Navy, move devised to signal to Vargas the disposition of the Roosevelt administration to serve as viable alternative to Germany for the procurement of military equipment.³⁶¹ However, both initiatives failed to provide the desired effects, largely due to the

³⁶⁰ In 1937, the U.S. Secretary of State invited Vargas' Economy Minister to Washington to discuss the increment of U.S. trade with Brazil. See: Artur de Sousa Costa, "Telegramas Para Getúlio Vargas," June 24, 1937, CPDOC.

³⁶¹ Stanley E. Hilton, "The Armed Forces and Industrialists in Modern Brazil: The Drive for Military Autonomy (1889-1954)," *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 62, no. 4 (1982): 648, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2514570>.

momentum of German-Brazilian commerce post-trade agreement and Argentina's resistance to U.S. efforts to strengthen Brazil's military capabilities.³⁶²

The advent of the *Estado Novo* appeared to confirm the prevailing sentiment in Washington that Vargas' government was gravitating toward even closer ties with Berlin. In the U.S. press, the coup in Brazil was widely perceived as evidence of German interference, fueling speculations about the Third Reich's involvement in the new regime. The New York Times, for instance, highlighted the positive coverage of the coup in Brazil by the German press, describing the new regime as "the first corporate State in South America."³⁶³ Along the same lines, the Washington Times, based in the U.S. capital, published an editorial alerting against the "bond of sympathy" developing between European dictatorships and the "good neighbors in Latin America."³⁶⁴

Personal letters from Oswaldo Aranha, who was serving as the Brazilian ambassador in Washington at that time, indicate that the suspicions expressed in the U.S. newspapers were also held within the Roosevelt administration.³⁶⁵ Nonetheless, in his public statements, the U.S. Under Secretary of State Benjamin Sumner Welles sought to shield the Brazilian government from the criticisms leveled by the U.S. press. When questioned about the developments in U.S. relations with Brazil, Welles assured that the bonds of friendship uniting the peoples of Brazil and the United

³⁶² See: Hilton, "The Armed Forces and Industrialists in Modern Brazil"; Seitenfus, *O Brasil de Getúlio Vargas e a Formação Dos Blocos, 1930-1942*.

³⁶³ "NAZI PRESS HAILS VARGAS; Germans See Coup in Brazil to Set Up Authoritarian Regime," *The New York Times*, November 11, 1937, sec. Archives, <https://www.nytimes.com/1937/11/11/archives/nazi-press-hails-vargas-germans-see-coup-in-brazil-to-set-up.html>.

³⁶⁴ "Let Voice of America Be Heard," *The Washington Times*, November 11, 1937, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84026749/1937-11-11/ed-1/seq-6/>.

³⁶⁵ Oswaldo Aranha, "Carta a Getúlio Vargas," November 24, 1937, CPDOC.

States had not been affected by “misinterpretations” circulating in U.S. news outlets about the Vargas regime.³⁶⁶

Aranha was instrumental in maintaining the relationship between Brazil and the United States following the 1937 coup. A noted admirer of U.S. society, Aranha had served as the Brazilian ambassador in Washington throughout Vargas’ constitutional government, a period during which he cultivated strong relationships not only with Secretary of State Cordell Hull but also with President Franklin D. Roosevelt.³⁶⁷ These established relationships proved crucial, as the trust American authorities placed in Aranha's favorable disposition toward the United States, along with his close personal relationship with the Brazilian President, lent credibility to the Brazilian government's efforts to reassure Washington regarding the new regime's position vis-à-vis the United States. Aranha's primary task was to persuade U.S. diplomats that the regime change did not alter Brazil's foreign policy, its commitment to cooperation with the United States, nor did it indicate an alignment with Hitler's Germany or Mussolini's Italy.

In his capacity as ambassador, Aranha sought to mitigate the negative perception that Vargas's coup had created within the U.S. public opinion. Privately, however, the Brazilian ambassador expressed his dissatisfaction with the authoritarian turn taken by Vargas. In a private letter to his Vargas, Aranha wrote:

"I cannot come to terms with the new Constitution, which is a revocation of Brazil, attempting to graft onto the vastness of our territory and the goodness of our people a regime incompatible with our traditions and with my beliefs."³⁶⁸

³⁶⁶ Special to THE NEW YORK TIMES, “BRAZIL IS ASSURED OF OUR SYMPATHY; Welles Says Our Friendship Has Not Been Impaired by President Vargas’s Coup,” *The New York Times*, December 7, 1937, sec. Archives, <https://www.nytimes.com/1937/12/07/archives/brazil-is-assured-of-our-sympathy-welles-says-our-friendship-has.html>.

³⁶⁷ Oswaldo Aranha, “Carta a Getúlio Vargas,” April 22, 1936, CPDOC.

³⁶⁸ Aranha, “Carta a Getúlio Vargas,” November 24, 1937.

The Brazilian ambassador expressed his hopes that his friend and president would heed his appeals and restore democratic rights and institutions. Otherwise, he declared, circumstances compelled him to withdraw from political life and cease any affiliation with the regime.³⁶⁹

Vargas was taken aback by Aranha's protests. For two weeks, the Brazilian President endeavored unsuccessfully to persuade his friend to continue his assignment in Washington. Aranha returned to Rio de Janeiro on December 20, 1937, after which negotiations continued to have him involved in shaping the new regime. Besides their friendship, Vargas understood that he could not afford to forgo Aranha's domestic popularity and, more importantly, the international legitimacy Aranha would confer upon the Estado Novo. A potential departure of Aranha from the government was viewed as particularly detrimental to the new regime's image in the eyes of the United States and its democratic allies.

In face of Vargas' insistence, Aranha ultimately agreed to take part in the cabinet. Nonetheless, the former ambassador to Washington made his involvement conditional upon the regime's adherence to a liberal international agenda that aligned with U.S. interests. Among the conditions imposed by Aranha were the immediate initiation of negotiations for the resumption of payments on Brazil's foreign debt, the regulation of trade to ensure a balance between compensated goods and those traded at market exchange rates, the formulation of a national strategy for the extraction and utilization of natural resources with foreign assistance, the strengthening of diplomatic relations with the United States, and, finally, his appointment as Minister of Foreign Affairs.³⁷⁰

³⁶⁹ Aranha.

³⁷⁰ Seitenfus, *O Brasil de Getúlio Vargas e a Formação Dos Blocos, 1930-1942*, 159.

Vargas did not commit to meeting all the conditions set by Aranha. Specifically, regarding the repayment of Brazil's foreign debt, Vargas claimed that it was materially impossible to do so immediately, a position that prompted public criticism from Aranha toward the government. The Brazilian president, however, welcomed the prospect of appointing Aranha to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. From Vargas's perspective, appointing Aranha to the position would help alleviate criticism, particularly from the U.S. press, against the new regime, while for Aranha, the role of Minister of Foreign Affairs represented an opportunity to ensure the regime's alignment with Roosevelt's Pan-Americanism.³⁷¹

Concluding Remarks

The period between the communist uprisings in November 1935 and the advent of the *Estado Novo* in November 1937 marked the zenith of the anticommunist collaboration between the Vargas regime and the Third Reich. During this period, anticommunism was elevated to a central theme in the bilateral agenda between Brazil and Germany, standing alongside trade issues that had previously dominated their diplomatic relations.

The addition of anticommunism to their common agenda reflected the complex interplay between domestic political priorities and emerging international alliances. Domestically, the activities of communist movements inspired or directly influenced by the Communist International was not a novel issue for either Hitler or Vargas. As discussed in previous chapters, both regimes, albeit acting independently, had prior to 1935 implemented measures to suppress movements deemed to espouse communist ideas. The groundwork for closer anticommunist collaboration had thus

³⁷¹ See notes in: Seitenfus, 160.

already been laid, with the Brazilian government expressing admiration and seeking inspiration as early as 1934 in the methods employed by the Nazi regime in its repressive campaign against communism. The significance of the communist uprisings in Brazil, therefore, lay in their role in drawing the attention of Nazi authorities to the Brazilian case, thereby making the desire for closer cooperation in the fight against communism reciprocal.

The timing of the 1935 uprisings also proved conducive to the development of an anticommunist collaboration between Brazil and Germany. By then, the Nazi regime was already showing interest in establishing an international alliance against communism, interest made evident by the ongoing negotiations between Hitler's foreign policy advisor, Joachim von Ribbentrop, and the Japanese military attaché, Hiroshi Oshima. Consequently, Vargas's anticommunist stance and the swift suppression of the uprisings in Natal, Recife, and Rio de Janeiro positioned Brazil as a potential ally in the emerging anticommunist international envisioned by the Third Reich.

The involvement of German nationals in the communist uprisings in Brazil further contributed to the interest of the Nazi regime in seeking a partnership with Brazilian authorities. The course of events, however, indicates that the German objectives in their negotiations with Brazil extended beyond simply clarifying the events that resulted in the attempted overthrow of Vargas' government. The heightened attention given to the uprisings in Brazil by the German press suggests a distinct interest, especially from Joseph Goebbels' ministry, in leveraging the event for propaganda purposes. As part of this strategy, the Brazilian uprisings were appropriated to legitimize Nazi regime propaganda, which portrayed communism as an imminent global threat and a tool of the Soviet Union for the destabilization of governments across the world, narrative

that greatly exaggerated the coordination and operational capabilities of the Communist International.

Furthermore, Nazi authorities identified an opportunity to utilize anticommunism as an additional avenue for projecting German influence in Brazil and in South America more broadly. In this regard, the German Foreign Office and the Gestapo adopted a proactive role in providing assistance to Vargas' political police in identifying and gathering intelligence on the German nationals accused of involvement in the 1935 uprisings in Brazil. The actions of the Third Reich eventually overcame the initial reluctance of the Brazilian government to share materials related to the investigations of the uprisings with German authorities. This development, coupled with the Brazilian ambassador's willingness to accommodate Gestapo requests, ultimately transformed the Brazilian Embassy in Berlin into a hub for the exchange of anticommunist intelligence between the two countries.

Building on this foundation, German-Brazilian anticommunist cooperation deepened, acquiring a new dimension in March 1937 with the visit to Germany by the Brazilian Captain Afonso Miranda Correia, the Deputy Chief of Police of the Federal District. The visit was funded by the German government, further signaling the interest of the Third Reich in strengthening ties with Brazilian authorities in their common objective of suppressing political opponents. During his stay, Correia benefitted from the established relations between the Brazilian Embassy and Hitler's political police. Sources indicate that the Brazilian captain was granted access to secret Gestapo facilities and was exposed to documents and techniques employed by the Nazis in anticommunist counterintelligence operations.

Brazilian officials, however, had limited opportunities to apply the knowledge acquired from the Gestapo. By mid-1937, the majority of communist organizations in Brazil had been dismantled, and those that remained no longer possessed the capacity to pose a significant challenge to Vargas's authority. Yet, the fear of communism remained a potent tool for mobilizing public opinion, proving decisive in legitimizing the authoritarian turn of the Vargas government, marked by the establishment of the Estado Novo dictatorship in November 1937. The move was widely celebrated by Hitler's regime. The advent of the Estado Novo was depicted as a symbol of the expansion of fascism to the Americas and perceived as the culmination of a rapprochement between like-minded regimes.

These developments did not escape the attention of U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt's administration. Concerns regarding the growing influence of the Berlin-Rome Axis in Latin America prompted a realignment in U.S. foreign policy toward the region, resulting in a more assertive approach to hemispheric relations. This shift marked a significant departure from the international conditions that had previously facilitated the rapprochement between Brazil and Nazi Germany. Until 1936, the Roosevelt administration's commitment to non-interventionism had afforded Brazil greater leeway in shaping its foreign policy, enabling Vargas to pursue closer ties with Germany with minimal risk of inciting a strong response from the United States. By contrast, the more active engagement of the Roosevelt administration with Latin American affairs compelled the Vargas regime to reassess its foreign policy, a shift that laid the groundwork for the rapid deterioration of German-Brazilian relations following November 1937.

Chapter

4. From Zenith to Crisis: The Collapse of the Anticommunist Partnership

Introduction

Contrary to the initial expectations associated with advent of the Estado Novo, the years between 1937 and 1942 were marked by a progressive erosion of diplomatic ties between Brazil and Nazi Germany. Although economic ties were slower to reflect the effects of this deterioration, the political-ideological bonds that had served as an additional pillar of the rapprochement between the Hitler and Vargas regimes were abruptly severed after November 1937. The anticommunist partnership, which had thrived since the 1935 uprisings, collapsed giving way to growing concerns within the Brazilian government about the Third Reich's interference in Brazil's internal affairs. As a result, the attention of Brazilian authorities was redirected away from concerns about communism and towards curbing the German government's influence over ethnic German communities, particularly in the southern and southeastern regions of Brazil.

This chapter examines the circumstances that led to the collapse of the anti-communist partnership between Brazil and Germany, structured in two parts. The first part addresses the redirection of the Estado Novo's repressive and propaganda apparatus toward the "nationalization" of ethnic communities, with a particular focus on the German community. It analyzes the content of the measures implemented by the Brazilian government and the conflicting conceptions of nationhood that made the positions of Vargas and the Third Reich irreconcilable.

The second part delves into the diplomatic repercussions of the Brazilian government's shift in policy, with a particular focus on the actions and influence of Vargas' newly appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs, Oswaldo Aranha. It examines how Aranha's leadership reshaped Brazil's foreign policy trajectory and contributed to the gradual breakdown of diplomatic ties with Nazi Germany. Additionally, this section explores the pivotal role played by the United States in this process, highlighting how American geopolitical and economic interests further exacerbated the deterioration of relations between the Estado Novo and Hitler's regime.

4.1. Vargas' Nationalization Campaign and the Issue of the Ethnic Germans

Contrary to the initial expectations raised by the establishment of an authoritarian regime in South America, the Nazi excitement with the course set by Vargas for the Estado Novo proved to be short-lived. Less than a month after dissolving the parliament and establishing the Estado Novo dictatorship, Vargas signaled his shift in policy towards Nazi Germany by issuing Decree 37 on December 2, 1937, which prohibited the existence of political parties or associations.³⁷² The prohibition included civic militias, and auxiliary organization to political parties, leaving little doubt as to the inclusion of the fascist *Ação Integralista Brasileira* among the organizations proscribed.

Plínio Salgado, leader of the AIB, reacted with restraint to the news. By then, Salgado still held hopes that Vargas would reward his support for the coup by appointing him to a position in the new cabinet. In a statement to the press, the *integralista* leader accepted the decision, asserting that the organization would henceforth dedicate itself to "spiritual goals, guided by the Christian

³⁷² Getúlio Vargas, "Decreto N° 37" (1937), <https://www2.camara.leg.br/legin/fed/declei/1930-1939/decreto-lei-37-2-dezembro-1937-354175-publicacaooriginal-1-pe.html>.

conscience."³⁷³ However, German diplomatic circles in Brazil promptly recognized the shift in attitude from the Vargas regime. By December 1937, it had become clear that communism no longer posed a real threat to Vargas' political ambitions, condition that allowed the regime in Rio de Janeiro to turn its attention to other political opponents, including those aligned with the interests and ideology of the Third Reich. Mirroring U.S. discourses surrounding the advent of the Estado Novo, German diplomats interpreted the new decree as a sign of Brazil's increasing deference to the United States, also qualifying Salgado's response as "weak" and "less than manly."³⁷⁴

The prohibition of political parties, however, was merely the first in a series of measures that contravened the interests of the Nazi regime in Brazil. Days after the issuance of Decree 37, the Federal Intervenor in the state Parana enacted a decree regulating the operation of ethnic schools. This measure had a notable impact on the ethnic German communities, which were especially prevalent in the state. According to the decree, German schools were allowed to remain operational, provided they also enrolled Brazilian students. Furthermore, German nationals were prohibited from teaching in said schools, and all subjects were mandated to be taught in Portuguese. A comparable measure was implemented in the state of Santa Catarina, which also housed a substantial ethnically German population.³⁷⁵

Reports from German Ambassador Ritter to the German Foreign Office indicated that following the issuance of the decree, Brazilian military representatives visited German schools in cities like

³⁷³ von Levetzow, "Verbot Der Politischen Parteien in Brasilien" (Rio de Janeiro, December 7, 1937), File R27196, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts.

³⁷⁴ von Levetzow.

³⁷⁵ Karl Ritter, "Nationalisierung Der Ausländischen Schulen" (Rio de Janeiro, December 16, 1937), File R27196, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts.

Blumenau, Joinville, and Curitiba, uttering harsh criticisms toward the “foreign elements” within Brazilian society. The German Ambassador observed that the decrees issued in Parana and Santa Catarina did not contract existing legislation regarding the operation of ethnic school in Brazil. Nonetheless, he suggested that individual provisions of the new decrees went “far beyond previous practice.”³⁷⁶

This was not the first instance of government targeting German communities in southern Brazil. Comparable restrictions on the use of the German language in schools and newspapers had been enforced on German-Brazilians during the later years of World War I.³⁷⁷ In the early 1930s, however, these communities had reestablished the use of the German language in public spaces without any substantial effort by the Brazilian government to curtail this practice. Nevertheless, whereas in the previous context the Brazilian government’s approach was primarily motivated by suspicions regarding the loyalty of these communities to their ancestral homeland, by 1937, the discourse of the “fifth column” was strategically employed by the government as a tool in the broader project for development of a unifying national identity.

Since at least 1933, Vargas dedicated resources and political capital to the establishment of a cultural policy devised to coin a sense of national identity among Brazilian. This commitment was exemplified by the establishment of the Ministry of Culture and Public Health in 1935, whose principal mandate was to foster a cohesive national identity through the promotion of cultural heritage sites and the implementation of civic education programs within Brazilian schools.³⁷⁸

³⁷⁶ Ritter.

³⁷⁷ See: Karina Kriegesmann, *Feindbild Fremde: Xenophobie als mediale Praxis in Brasilien (1917–1930)*, *Eigene und fremde Welten*, Band 38 (Frankfurt New York: Campus Verlag, 2020).

³⁷⁸ See: Daryle Williams, *Culture Wars in Brazil: The First Vargas Regime, 1930 - 1945* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001).

Nonetheless, the government's actions were often constrained by the presence of more immediate concerns or by the inherent limitations of a democratic regime, such as opposition from the Brazilian Congress. With the establishment of the Estado Novo dictatorship, these constraints lost significance, enabling Vargas to pursue more aggressively his goal of forging a unified Brazilian identity.

4.1.1. Competing Visions of Nationhood

In his report to his superiors regarding the measures taken against German schools, Ritter accurately observed that the decrees enacted in Paraná and Santa Catarina reflected an “increasing tendency of the new government to nationalize elements of foreign descent.”³⁷⁹ Measures at the federal level, however, would only begin to be implemented in January 1938, with the creation of a national council responsible for developing new regulations pertaining to the entry, settlement, naturalization, and expulsion of foreign citizens.³⁸⁰

Building on the council's studies, Vargas issued Decree-Law No. 383 on April 18, 1938. Said Decree-Law is regarded as the legislation that officially launched Vargas's nationalization campaign, by enacting a nationwide prohibition on the political participation of foreign citizens in Brazil.³⁸¹ According to the decree-law, foreign nationals residing in Brazil were barred from engaging in any political activities, provision that included “their participation in or establishment

³⁷⁹ Ritter, “Nationalisierung Der Ausländischen Schulen.”

³⁸⁰ Francisco Campos, “Decreto N° 2.265” (1938), <https://www2.camara.leg.br/legin/fed/decret/1930-1939/decreto-2265-25-janeiro-1938-345763-publicacaooriginal-1-pe.html>.

³⁸¹ Francisco Campos, “Decreto-Lei N° 383” (1938), <https://www2.camara.leg.br/legin/fed/declei/1930-1939/decreto-lei-383-18-abril-1938-350781-publicacaooriginal-1-pe.html>; Giralda Seyferth, “Os Imigrantes e a Campanha de Nacionalização Do Estado Novo,” in *Repensando o Estado Novo*, ed. Dulce Pandolfi (Rio de Janeiro: Fundação Getúlio Vargas, 1999), 199–228; René Gertz, *O Perigo Alemão* (Porto Alegre: Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, 1991).

of associations, foundations, companies, clubs, or any other entities with a political character.”³⁸² This provision applied even if said entities were exclusively dedicated to propaganda or dissemination among their compatriots of ideas, programs, or policies associated with political parties from their country of origin. Once more, the targeted nature of the nationalization campaign became apparent. Although the wording of the decree-law suggested a broad mandate for government action, it was the NSDAP that had most systematically sought to mobilize German ethnic communities in Brazil, a nuance that did not go unnoticed by Ambassador Ritter.

“This measure, although it formally applies to citizens of all countries according to the wording of the decree, is undoubtedly aimed, based on previous practice, primarily at all German party organizations, which must be dissolved, with the exception, as far as can be seen, of the Labor Front and the Women's League.”³⁸³

As a means of publicly expressing his government's dissatisfaction, Ritter proposed that the German press be instructed to report on the decree with a critical tone, while ensuring that this did not escalate into excessively severe criticisms of the Brazilian government. He suggested that German publications emphasize that the long-standing friendship between Brazil and Germany was at risk, arguing that Germany was “no longer in a position to extend its customary sympathy to the current Brazilian government, as long as it maintains such an unusually unfriendly attitude towards Germany.”³⁸⁴

The critical campaign in the German press against the Brazilian government, however, failed to achieve the desired outcome. Less than a month after the enactment of Decree-Law 37, a new decree, issued on May 4, further intensified the crackdown on ethnic communities, thereby

³⁸² Campos, Decreto-Lei n° 383.

³⁸³ Karl Ritter, “Telegram to the AA” (Rio de Janeiro, April 21, 1938), File R27196, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts.

³⁸⁴ Ritter.

exacerbating diplomatic tensions between Brazil and Germany. Decree-Law No. 406 sought to regulate the entry and residence of foreigners in Brazil, imposing new restrictions on their rights. The decree garnered particular attention for its Chapter VIII, which established regulations regarding the concentration and assimilation of ethnic communities residing in Brazil. According to the decree, each colony or rural settlement “must maintain a minimum of 30% Brazilians and a maximum of 25% of any single foreign nationality.”³⁸⁵ Furthermore, the decree prohibited the publication of books, magazines, and newspapers in languages other than Portuguese within rural settlements, reintroducing restrictions on foreign language publications reminiscent of those implemented during the final years of World War I.³⁸⁶

Decree-Law No. 406 serves as a clear illustration of the stance of the Vargas regime on the issue of national identity. In contrast to the concept of race, which was central to the Nazi understanding of the nation, the ability of an ethnic group to assimilate was regarded as a key criterion for its inclusion within a Brazilian conception of the nation. Accordingly, factors such as proficiency in the Portuguese language, knowledge and reverence to national symbols, and identification with the nation's history were established as defining criteria of “Brazilianess,” also serving as proxies for one’s loyalty to the country.

For this reason, the views espoused by the Vargas regime regarding the German communities in Brazil came into direct conflict with the universalizing doctrine championed by the Nazis. From the Third Reich’s perspective, the assimilation of German immigrants into Brazilian society was

³⁸⁵ Getúlio Vargas, “Decreto-Lei Nº 406” (1938), <https://www2.camara.leg.br/legin/fed/declei/1930-1939/decreto-lei-406-4-maio-1938-348724-publicacaooriginal-1-pe.html>.

³⁸⁶ Vargas.

fundamentally incompatible with the centrality of preserving racial purity, rendering the German and Brazilian perspectives on nationality irreconcilable.

4.1.2 A Failed Fascist Alliance

Amidst rising tensions with Brazil, German diplomacy sought international assistance to exert pressure on the Vargas regime to reverse its nationalization policies. In a telegram sent to South American embassies, the State Secretary of the German Foreign Office, Ernst von Weizsäcker, reported that the issue of nationalization measures had been a subject of discussion between German and Italian officials during Hitler's visit to Mussolini in May 1938. Nonetheless, Weizsäcker characterized the Italian response as evasive. According to the German State Secretary, Italy showed little interest in a collaboration with Germany claiming the “Italian fascist groups in Brazil had a completely colorless, apolitical character.” Italian officials also revealed that they had already reached a secret agreement with Brazil on the matter.³⁸⁷

The specific terms of agreement between the regimes of Vargas and Mussolini were not disclosed, but the existence of such an agreement may explain the more lenient approach adopted by Brazilian authorities towards the Italian communities. The most compelling explanation for why Germans were singled out as the primary focus of Vargas's nationalization campaign, however, may have been provided by the Argentinian ambassador in Berlin. It was the opinion of the South American diplomat that “the Italians and other foreigners, in contrast to the Germans, maintained their community life in a way that appeared to the Argentinians as harmless and non-threatening.”³⁸⁸

³⁸⁷ Konsul Molly, “Verhatung von Deutschen in Sao Paulo” (São Paulo, May 19, 1938), File R27196, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts.

³⁸⁸ Konsul Molly.

This position was certainly shared by Brazilian authorities. The sustained isolation of some German communities in southern Brazil, coupled with their commitment to preserving the language and customs of their ancestors, were increasingly perceived as a symptom of their lack of allegiance to the Brazilian state. In this regard, the arrest of six German nationals, two German-Brazilians, and one stateless Sudeten German in connection with the Integralists' attempted coup against Vargas certainly did little to alleviate the suspicions held by Brazilian authorities. The individuals arrested were suspected of being members of the Brazilian branch of the NSDAP and accused of disseminating Nazi ideas among the German-speaking communities as well as attempting to “secede parts of Brazil in favor of Germany.”³⁸⁹

In the days following the *Integralista* uprising, Brazilian newspapers reported that the attempted coup by the Brazilian fascists had received financial support from the Third Reich. Vargas himself hinted at the possibility, stating in a speech that the coup attempt against him had “assistance from abroad.”³⁹⁰ In sum, the notion that the Nazi regime sought to directly intervene in Brazilian politics, thereby constituting a threat to Brazil's national security and sovereignty, began to gain momentum within public discourse.

In turn, the perception of a Nazi threat to Brazilian sovereignty further fueled hostile sentiment toward German communities. As the onset of World War II drew nearer, immigrants of German descent faced growing stigmatization, with their loyalty to the Brazilian state increasingly scrutinized and accusations arising that they were part of a “fifth column” serving Hitler’s interests to bring Brazil under the control of the Third Reich. In a telegram dated May 14, Ritter reported

³⁸⁹ Konsul Molly.

³⁹⁰ Karl Ritter, “Telegram Nr. 64” (Rio de Janeiro, May 14, 1938), File R27196, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts.

to the regime in Berlin on the increasingly hostile environment toward Germany that was emerging in Brazil. Nonetheless, given the ineffectiveness of his previous efforts, the German ambassador shifted from a conciliatory approach, proposing an escalation of the matter and inquiring whether he was authorized to sever diplomatic relations with Brazil should the agitation against Germany continue.³⁹¹

4.2. The Severance of Diplomatic Relations

Following Ritter's protests, Moniz de Aragão met with officials at the German Foreign Office, where he sought to mitigate the negative impression created within the German government by the criticisms voiced in the Brazilian press. According to the Brazilian diplomat, the criticisms towards Germany featured in the press did not reflect the position of the Brazilian government. He further downplayed the issue by assuring State Secretary Weizsäcker that the anti-German articles had only appeared in lesser-known, second-tier newspapers. Moniz de Aragão concluded by noting that the government had already taken steps to ensure a more favorable coverage of Germany in the Brazilian press, gesture he hoped would be reciprocated by the Nazi regime.³⁹²

Moniz de Aragão's remarks, however, were not aligned with the position of Oswaldo Aranha, who had recently taken office as Brazil's Minister of Foreign Affairs. Aranha had been a steadfast opponent of rapprochement with Germany since 1936, a stance that remained unchanged at the time of his appointment to the Estado Novo cabinet. In a similar vein, the disagreements between Aranha and Vargas over the significance of Germany to Brazil's trade persisted. Whereas Vargas

³⁹¹ Ritter.

³⁹² Ernst von Weizsäcker, "Memorandum Distributed to the Chef of the Auslandsorganisation" (Berlin, May 18, 1938), File R27196, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts.

sought to mitigate the effects of his nationalization campaign on trade relations with Germany, Aranha viewed the Third Reich as a threat to political stability of the Americas and, consequently, advocated for an unequivocal alignment with the United States.

Although the positions of Vargas and Aranha remained largely unchanged, the context in which this divergence was situated had shifted significantly since 1936. On the international stage, the United States had adopted a more assertive role in its relations with Latin America, while Hitler's annexation of Austria intensified concerns about the potential outbreak of a new large-scale conflict in Europe. Meanwhile, on the domestic front, the establishment of the Estado Novo had solidified Vargas's control over Brazil's political institutions. The suppression of communism, initiated in the early years following the 1930 revolution and intensified after the 1935 uprisings, had been largely successful, enabling Vargas to redirect the focus of his repressive apparatus toward other groups, most notably ethnic communities considered insufficiently assimilated.

In addition, the circumstances that led Aranha to reconsider his affiliation with the regime altered the power asymmetry that had previously existed between him and Vargas. Despite disagreements over the direction of Brazil's foreign policy, by 1938, Aranha had gained increased autonomy to implement his policy of rapprochement with the United States. As a result, when confronted with protests from the German government, Aranha made little effort to preserve diplomatic relations between the Estado Novo and the Third Reich.

4.2.1. The Aranha-Ritter Quarrel

Between December 1937 and April 1938, Ritter manifested on several occasions the dissatisfaction of his government with the nationalization measures enacted by the Vargas regime. Vargas, however, did little to address these concerns beyond assuring the German ambassador that the

measures were broad in scope and not specifically targeted at Germany or the Germans in Brazil.³⁹³

In light of the Brazilian government's inaction during this period and the announcement of new measures in April 1938, Ritter issued a verbal protest to the government, followed by a formal written protest dated May 10.

In the protest letter addressed to Aranha, Ritter articulated the Nazi regime's interpretation, which held that the NSDAP was not merely a political party but a legally constituted entity of the German state. Among the party's tasks, Ritter emphasized, was the promotion of political education of Germans at home and abroad.³⁹⁴ As part of this framework, NSDAP branches established abroad were recognized as extensions of the Nazi Party within Germany. Therefore, a ban on NSDAP activities in Brazil, Ritter argued, affected directly as organ of the German state administration and the German government. Ritter proceeded with his argument by downplaying the necessity of implementing such measures. According to the German ambassador, NSDAP branches abroad had the strictest instructions not to interfere in the internal politics of the host country.³⁹⁵

In his response dated May 17, Aranha forcefully dismissed Ritter's complaint, asserting that the Brazilian government found no merit in such a protest. Aranha emphasized that the decree-law of April 18 was based on principles of national defense, specifically aimed at safeguarding national integrity—principles, he stressed, that are fundamental to any sovereign state. Furthermore, Aranha rejected Ritter's argument regarding the legitimacy of NSDAP-affiliated organizations

³⁹³ Seitenfus, *O Brasil de Getúlio Vargas e a Formação Dos Blocos, 1930-1942*, 185.

³⁹⁴ Karl Ritter, "Protest Letter to Brazil's Minister of Foreign Affairs" (Rio de Janeiro, May 10, 1938), File R27196, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts.

³⁹⁵ Ritter.

operating abroad to circumvent local legislation, regardless of their legal status in their home country.³⁹⁶

The Brazilian Minister of Foreign Affairs also disputed Ritter's assertion that the decree's provisions, which prohibited foreign cultural, charitable, and aid associations, infringed upon the personal freedoms of German families in Brazil. Ritter was particularly concerned with Article 5, which restricted Brazilian nationals—defined to include the children of foreign nationals born in Brazil—from participating in such organizations. Aranha, however, rejected the German ambassador's interpretation of Article 5, sarcastically questioning whether the ambassador intended to deny Brazil the right to legislate on its own citizens.³⁹⁷

Aranha's response unequivocally demonstrates that the Brazilian Minister had no intention of negotiating a compromise between Vargas' nationalization policies and Germany's interests in preserving ties with the ethnic German population in Brazil. This stance was endorsed by Vargas, yet the Brazilian president did not display the same animosity toward Germany as his minister. Despite adhering to the formal conventions of diplomatic discourse, Aranha's hostility toward Nazi Germany subtly emerged in the tone of his concluding remarks in the document addressed to Ritter.

In final paragraphs of his response, Aranha conveyed quite bluntly his belief that the negative remarks made by Brazilian newspapers against Germany were “entirely justifiable,” citing the perceived involvement of German nationals in the Integralist coup attempt against Vargas. Furthermore, invoking U.S. diplomatic rhetoric, the Brazilian minister linked Brazil's

³⁹⁶ Oswaldo Aranha, “Reponse to Protest Letter from German Ambassador (Translation)” (Rio de Janeiro, May 26, 1938), File R27196, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts.

³⁹⁷ Aranha.

nationalization measures to its desire for peace, a stance he argued was consistent with Brazil's commitment to preserving "internal tranquility."³⁹⁸ In Aranha's words:

“This is why we are taking steps to protect ourselves, as far as possible, from unpleasant incidents, such as those that have already occurred and will continue to occur due to certain activities of foreign political organizations, through measures that we deem appropriate and over which we are the sole arbiters.”³⁹⁹

In a report on the political situation in Brazil, Ritter highlighted the Brazilian minister's evident hostility toward Germany. The German ambassador accurately attributed said hostility to Aranha's alignment and close rapport with the Roosevelt administration in Washington. It was Ritter's assessment, that South America, and Brazil in particular, had become the battleground for an ideological struggle between Germany and the United States, for which the nationalization campaign and the attitude of Vargas' Foreign Minister served as evidence. The objective, Ritter claimed, was securing not only the region's allegiance but, most importantly, its resources in the event of a war.⁴⁰⁰

Nonetheless, the German ambassador miscalculated the extent to which Vargas endorsed, albeit tacitly, the actions of his Foreign Minister. Amidst the rising tensions, Ritter reported that relations between Aranha and the president were not harmonious.

“On the contrary, one gets the impression that a silent battle is being fought behind the scenes between the two for the future first position of power in Brazil. In this battle, the United States of North America is backing the current Foreign Minister, while the army is still backing the President.”⁴⁰¹

³⁹⁸ Aranha.

³⁹⁹ Aranha.

⁴⁰⁰ Karl Ritter, “Bericht Im Anschluss and Die Berichte Vom 28. Und 30. Mai 1938” (Rio de Janeiro, June 2, 1938), File R27196, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts.

⁴⁰¹ Karl Ritter, “Brasiliens Innerpolitische Lage Und Verhältnis Zu Deutschland” (Rio de Janeiro, June 15, 1938), File R104940, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts.

Building on this premise, Ritter advocated for German diplomacy to concentrate on isolating the Foreign Minister, while fostering closer ties with individuals more sympathetic to the German position, specifically within the Ministry of Justice and the Brazilian military. As a result, Ritter did not actively seek to alleviate his strained relations with Aranha, while his efforts to circumvent the minister's authority were continually hindered by the resistance the upper echelons of Brazil's government. One of his tactics, was, whenever possible, presenting his pleas against the nationalization campaign directly to Vargas, who frequently referred him back to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Chief of Police of the Federal District.⁴⁰²

The animosity between Ritter and Aranha escalated to a critical point when the German ambassador stormed the Foreign Minister's office at the *Palácio do Itamaraty*. The event was followed by a heated argument that resulted in Aranha expelling Ritter from his office.⁴⁰³ In response to the untenable situation resulting from the incident, the Brazilian government formally requested the German Foreign Office for Ritter's replacement. Berlin's initial response to the request appeared favorable. Ritter was scheduled to attend the annual Nazi rally in Nuremberg, during which the process of his replacement was to be formalized.⁴⁰⁴

However, the Brazilian government was taken by surprise when Wilhelmstrasse changed its position, informing them that Ritter would return to Brazil. A renewed request was submitted to the German Foreign Office, highlighting the ambassador's lack of diplomatic decorum and stressing the critical importance of his replacement for the preservation of favorable relations between Brazil and Germany. Nevertheless, Wilhelmstrasse remained unwavering, a position that

⁴⁰² von Weizsäcker, "Memorandum Distributed to the Chef of the Auslandsorganisation"; Getúlio Vargas, *Diários 1937-1942* (Rio de Janeiro: Fundação Getúlio Vargas, 1995), 128.

⁴⁰³ Stanley E. Hilton, *Oswaldo Aranha: Uma Biografia* (Rio de Janeiro: Objetiva, 1994), 275.

⁴⁰⁴ Oswaldo Aranha, "Carta a Luigi Sparano," November 16, 1938, CPDOC.

prompted the Brazilian government to interpret Ritter's return as indicative of the Nazi regime's intent to meddle in Brazil's domestic affairs.⁴⁰⁵

To prevent Ritter's return and the anticipated consequences it was believed to entail, Aranha formally declared the German ambassador *persona non grata*. As an act of reciprocity, the Third Reich requested the recall of the Brazilian ambassador from Berlin. The withdrawal of the ambassadors solidified the diplomatic crisis between Brazil and Germany, which had been unfolding since November 1937. Although it did not constitute a formal break in diplomatic relations, it ushered in a new phase in the relationship between the Estado Novo and the Third Reich, one that would ultimately lay the groundwork for Brazil and Germany to find themselves on opposing sides in the approaching war.

4.2.2. The Road to War

The vacancies of mission chiefs at the embassies in Berlin and Rio de Janeiro persisted until August 1939, just ahead of the outbreak of World War II. On both sides of the Atlantic, there was a growing belief that the forthcoming conflict would enhance the commercial ties between Brazil and Germany to their mutual advantage. However, the political cooperation that had invigorated German-Brazilian relations up until 1937 was no longer salvageable. Despite the apparent ideological alignment between the two regimes, Brazil and Germany had irreversibly diverged from the core issues that had brought them together in the mid-1930s. Anticommunism itself lost prominence among the priorities of both regimes, eliminating one of the central pillars that had drawn Brazil closer to Nazi Germany following the uprisings of November 1935.

⁴⁰⁵ Aranha.

On the Brazilian side, the crackdown following the uprisings in Natal, Recife, and Rio de Janeiro had effectively dismantled the mobilizing capacity of communist organizations within the country. Subsequently, the Estado Novo redirected the focus of its repressive and propaganda apparatus toward the nationalization campaign, relegating anticommunism to a subordinate role as a theme of the regime's propaganda. Likewise, in Germany, the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and the onset of World War II caused the Nazis to moderate their anticommunist rhetoric. Said rhetoric would only return to levels comparable to those of the mid-1930s in the period leading up to Operation Barbarossa.

In addition to this, the substantial rise in U.S.-Brazilian trade in 1940 further reduced Germany's relevance on Brazil's diplomatic agenda. Until 1939, the U.S. decision to refrain from getting involved in the war enabled the continuity of the positive trajectory of German-Brazilian. In this scenario, Vargas was able to continue making ideological overtures toward the Third Reich, while eliciting minimal objections from the Roosevelt administration.⁴⁰⁶ From 1940 onwards, however, it became clear that the relationship with Germany was being strategically utilized to incentivize greater U.S. involvement in advancing Brazil's economic interests.

The principal objective of the Vargas regime during that period was to obtain support for the development of a steel production complex in Brazil. Negotiations with the German firm Krupp reached an advanced stage; however, Aranha conveyed the terms of the agreement to the U.S. government, which swiftly mobilized to present Brazil with an alternative proposal. On September 25, 1940, the mission sent to the United States by Aranha successfully signed an agreement with the Federal Loan Administration, granting Brazil a 20 million dollars in credit for the construction

⁴⁰⁶ See: Getúlio Vargas, "Discurso a Bordo Do Encouraçado Minas Gerais" (Rio de Janeiro, July 11, 1940), <http://www.biblioteca.presidencia.gov.br/presidencia/ex-presidentes/getulio-vargas/discursos/1940/21.pdf/view>.

of its steel production complex.⁴⁰⁷ In that same year, the U.S. government instituted the Inter-American Coffee Marketing Agreement, which was tasked with establishing coffee distribution quotas for the U.S. market. Under this agreement, Brazil was assigned a quota of 558 tons of coffee beans, amounting to nearly three times the quota allocated to Colombia, the second-largest beneficiary.⁴⁰⁸

In conjunction with the expansion of bilateral trade, these measures contributed to the United States solidifying its long-term significance within Brazil's economic agenda, providing a foundation for subsequent negotiations focused on enhancing military cooperation between the two nations. These negotiations, however, faced considerable challenges, primarily due to the opposition from senior officials within the Brazilian military to allowing U.S. forces to use bases in Brazil, as well as their reluctance to engage in U.S.-supported collective security operations in the region.

Despite these challenges, Vargas effectively projected a public image of alignment with the hemispheric defense strategy advocated by the Roosevelt administration. This shift coincided with heightened U.S. pressure on Brazil to adopt a clear and unequivocal position regarding the potential escalation of the conflict to the American continent. In response to this context, Vargas assured the U.S. ambassador in Rio de Janeiro, Jefferson Caffery, that Brazil would fulfill its commitments to hemispheric security, a position reaffirmed in speeches delivered on September 7 and November 10.⁴⁰⁹

⁴⁰⁷ Seitenfus, *O Brasil de Getúlio Vargas e a Formação Dos Blocos, 1930-1942*, 339.

⁴⁰⁸ Seitenfus, 339.

⁴⁰⁹ Ricardo Antônio Silva Seitenfus, *O Brasil de Getúlio Vargas e a Formação Dos Blocos, 1930-1942: O Processo Do Envolvimento Brasileiro Na II Guerra Mundial*, Brasiliiana. Grande Formato, v. 22 (São Paulo, SP, Brasil: Companhia Editora Nacional, 1985), 359.

Although ideological alignment introduced uncertainty about the Brazilian president's stance, the circumstances following the *Estado Novo* coup had made it untenable to sustain the diplomatic “equidistance” between Germany and the United States that had characterized Brazilian foreign policy in the mid-1930s.⁴¹⁰ Brazil’s prioritization of assimilating ethnic German communities within its borders rendered the positions of Brazil and Germany on nationality irreconcilable, signaling the onset of a realignment in Brazilian foreign policy toward closer relations with the United States. Furthermore, the concessions offered by the United States after 1940, coupled with the concomitant decline in trade with Germany, rendered the continuation with of Vargas’ pragmatic neutrality disadvantageous from the Brazilian standpoint. The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor thus represented the materialization of a scenario anticipated by both the Roosevelt administration and the Vargas regime, for which both governments had been preparing since at least May 1940. In this context, Vargas' decision to declare war on Germany can be seen as the logical culmination of a gradual process of estrangement from Nazi Germany, ultimately positioning the former allies in the in the struggle against communism on opposite sides of World War II.

Concluding Remarks

In sum, the establishment of the *Estado Novo* marked the dissolution of the anticommunist partnership between Brazil and the Third Reich. Although influenced by different factors, the anticommunist agenda gradually lost prominence among the domestic and international priorities of both regimes. In the case of Brazil, this shift resulted from the effective suppression of

⁴¹⁰ On the pragmatic equidistance thesis, see: Gerson Moura, *Autonomia Na Dependência: A Política Externa Brasileira de 1935 a 1942* (Rio de Janeiro: Nova Fronteira, 1980).

communist and communist-inspired movements in the aftermath of the uprisings of November 1935 and the consolidation of an autocratic regime under Vargas in 1937. For Germany, on the other hand, it stemmed from wartime considerations, which required a tempering of Nazi anticommunist rhetoric to enable the signature of a non-aggression pact with the Soviet Union.

In addition to the context described above, the Brazilian government's decision to implement a "nationalization" campaign targeted at ethnic communities residing in Brazil, with a specific emphasis on the German population, brought the differing conceptions of nationality espoused by Brazil and Germany into direct conflict. This divergence, rigidly maintained by both regimes, ultimately contributed to the deterioration of the previously cordial diplomatic relations between Vargas' and Hitler's regimes.

In light of this already unfavorable scenario for relations between Brazil and the Third Reich, the increasingly assertive stance of the United States in forging a hemispheric alliance required the abandonment of the equidistant diplomatic practices that had characterized Brazilian foreign policy in the mid-1930s. In an effort to dispel concerns about Brazil's commitment to the hemispheric alliance, Vargas escalated measures that clearly aligned with the security priorities promoted by the United States, measures which included the appointment of Oswaldo Aranha to head the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Aranha appointment not only signaled Vargas' goodwill towards the United States but also exacerbated tensions with the German Foreign Office. In addition to being a staunch opponent of closer ties with the Nazi regime, Aranha had personal disagreements with the German ambassador to Brazil, Karl Ritter, which culminated in a diplomatic crisis that led to the withdrawal of ambassadors from both countries from their respective posts in Berlin and Rio de Janeiro.

In sum, the period between 1937 and 1942 was marked by the steady deterioration of German-Brazilian diplomatic relation. Despite repeated attempts at rapprochement by the Third Reich, the rift between the Vargas and Hitler regimes continued to deepen. This growing estrangement was driven by both ideological and geopolitical factors, culminating in Brazil's formal declaration of war on Germany on August 22, 1942. The breakdown of relations, despite earlier efforts to maintain diplomatic equidistance, reflected Brazil's shifting alignment toward the Allied powers and its increasing prioritization of hemispheric security in cooperation with the United States.

Conclusion

The analysis undertaken in this study aimed to shed light on the diplomatic significance of the anticommunist agenda in the rapprochement between Nazi Germany and the Brazilian government under Getúlio Vargas. The evidence presented supports the conclusion that anticommunism, alongside trade, was converted into a pillar of the bilateral relations between Brazil and Nazi Germany, particularly after November 1935, when factions linked to the National Liberation Alliance—an organization whose leadership included members of the Brazilian Communist Party—revolted against the Brazilian government. In the years that followed, the regimes in Berlin and Rio de Janeiro capitalized on the opportunity provided by the 1935 uprisings to strengthen their ties, devising a sophisticated collaboration that encompassed counterintelligence operations, law enforcement coordination, as well as the formulation and distribution of anticommunist propaganda.

The scope of the anticommunist collaboration between the Hitler and Vargas regimes, however, neither began nor ended with the events transpired in the immediate aftermath of the uprising of November 1935. Rather, they were part of a broader process that spanned the period from 1933 to 1938, and which can be divided into three distinct moments. The first of these moments was defined by the parallel development of anticommunist policies and discourses in both Brazil and Germany. During this period, which extended until 1935, anticommunism had not yet entered the bilateral diplomatic agenda between the two nations, but it played a prominent role in shaping their respective domestic political landscapes.

The emergence of anticommunist discourses and movements can be understood as a global phenomenon, largely driven by the anxieties and geopolitical tensions sparked by the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the establishment of the Communist International (Comintern) in 1919. These events catalyzed widespread fears of revolutionary upheaval, prompting a concomitant ideological and political backlash across multiple nations. However, the manifestations of anticommunism in Brazil and Germany were shaped significantly by their respective national contexts, resulting in the development of fundamentally distinct discourses on the nature and scope of the communist threat.

The distinction between the two regimes becomes particularly evident when analyzing the central role of racialized discourses in shaping the anticommunist narrative articulated in Brazil and Germany during the 1930s. For the Nazi Party (NSDAP), and consequently for the Third Reich, communism was framed as intrinsically linked to the issue of "race," grounded in the virulent antisemitism espoused by the Hitler's party. This perspective was encapsulated in the notion of "Judeo-Bolshevism," a category frequently exploited by the party to shape public opinion and propagate the idea of communism an existential threat to the so-called "Aryan race," to which Germans were purported to belong. Conversely, the centrality of a racialized social perspective was less pronounced in the Brazilian context. This is not to suggest that the concept of "race" was absent from public discourse under the Vargas regime; however, they did not appear to play a decisive role in the construction of the communist threat within local political narratives. Anticommunism in Brazil under Vargas was more prominently based on moralizing and nationalist discourses, depicting communist militants as immoral and subservient to a foreign power, in this case, the Soviet Union.

These distinctions, at least in this initial stage, did not hinder anticommunism from serving as a catalyst for the political-ideological rapprochement between the Vargas regime and the Third Reich. As early as 1934, individuals within Vargas's inner circle conveyed to the Brazilian president their admiration for the authoritarian model established by Hitler in Germany, advocating for the adaptation and implementation in Brazil of policies and institutions modeled after the Nazi regime. Such was the case with the Nazi Ministry of Propaganda and Public Enlightenment, whose efforts drew the attention of Vargas's Chief of Staff, Luís Simões Lopes. Vargas had previously experimented with initiatives dedicated to the diffusion of propaganda in the immediate aftermath of the 1930 coup that brought him to power. Nonetheless, the insights gained after 1933 regarding the structure and functioning of Goebbels' Ministry enabled the Brazilian government to refine its own strategy by implementing within the Department of Propaganda and Cultural Diffusion (DPDC) practices drawn from the Nazi propaganda ministry, albeit on a smaller scale.

Concurrently, Vargas undertook initiatives to centralize the repressive apparatus of the Brazilian state, transforming the Civil Police of the Federal District, and in particular its Department of Political and Social Order, into a national coordinating body for the suppression of political opponents. In this regard, the example set by the crackdown on communist militants accused of plotting the Reichstag fire served as an important influence. The attack perpetrated against the German parliament building and the violent repression that ensued received extensive coverage in the Brazilian press, circumstance that coupled with the advice of his aides, converted the Nazi response into a blueprint for authoritarian consolidation.

While the Brazilian government was drawing on the anticommunist practices of Hitler's regime, the Third Reich's interest in Brazil centered on other priorities. Before 1935, Nazi foreign policy

toward the South American nation was primarily concerned with advancing its economic objectives and strengthening the NSDAP's connections with ethnic Germans living abroad. In this context, the significance of anticommunism was largely confined to the latter objective. Much like in Germany, Hitler's regime employed anticommunist rhetoric as a tool to mobilize and garner the support of German communities in Brazil for National Socialism, yielding promising outcomes.

The analysis of articles in German-language newspapers published in Brazil indicates that these communities were more receptive to anticommunist rhetoric compared to other ideological tenets of Nazism, such as antisemitism. While antisemitism featured more prominently in publications by the Brazilian branch of the NSDAP, anticommunist propaganda was prevalent across publications associated with various groups within the German communities in Brazil. This heightened receptivity can be attributed to the centrality of discourse about the communist threat in Brazilian society, where antisemitism, although present, occupied a less prominent role in public discourse. This hypothesis is further supported by the fact that the newspapers analyzed frequently featured German translations of news articles, originally published in the Portuguese-language press, that depicted communism in a negative light.

The communist uprisings in Natal, Recife, and Rio de Janeiro in November 1935 marked the onset of the second moment, as identified in this study, in the process that engendered the anticommunist collaboration between Brazil and Germany. This phase, which extended until 1937, represented the high point of the anticommunist cooperation between the two nations, characterized by the formal inclusion of anticommunism in their bilateral diplomatic agenda. The violent repression carried out by the Vargas government in response to the 1935 uprisings drew the attention of the Third Reich, prompting a shift in the dynamics of cooperation between the two countries. What

had initially been a unilateral appropriation of the Nazi model by Brazil evolved into a mutual-interest initiative, aligning the priorities of both Berlin and Rio de Janeiro.

Nazi interest in the communist uprisings in Brazil was driven primarily by two key factors. The first factor pertains to the potential for the events of November 1935 to be leveraged by the Third Reich for propaganda purposes. The occurrence of a communist uprising in South America appeared to confirm the narrative advanced by Hitler's propaganda apparatus, which depicted communism as an imminent, global threat. The timing of the uprisings in Brazil, occurring only months after Goebbels' notorious "Communism Without the Mask" speech at Nuremberg Rally, further reinforced the strategic value of the Brazilian example, thereby bolstering the credibility of the Nazi narrative. To capitalize on these circumstances, German news agencies, subordinated to the Ministry of Propaganda, were directed to provide more extensive coverage of the uprisings, a coverage unusual for events pertaining to Brazil's domestic political affairs. As the uprisings in Brazil unfolded, news agencies like the *Deutsches Nachrichtenbüro* offered near-daily coverage of the events, further supporting the notion that the regime sought to exploit the incidents in Brazil to intensify fear of communism among the German public.

The second factor contributing to the Nazi regime's interest in anticommunist collaboration with Brazil derives from desire to establish an international alliance aimed at countering communism and curbing Soviet influence in international affairs. By November 1935, Hitler's foreign affairs advisor, Joachim von Ribbentrop, and the Japanese military attaché, Hiroshi Ōshima, had initiated discussions regarding the formalization of an anticommunist alliance. For most of 1936, negotiations were kept secret. However, as early as January of that year, Hitler hinted to the

Brazilian ambassador in Berlin at the possibility of forming a "defensive entente" against Moscow, indicating his desire to include Brazil in this initiative.

Despite the proactive stance of the Third Reich, the Vargas government resisted formally committing to what would eventually become the Anti-Comintern Pact due to fears of provoking a strong reaction from the United States. Instead of aligning fully with Nazi Germany's interests, the primary objective of Brazilian foreign policy was to maintain, for as long as possible, a pragmatic balance that ensured favorable relations with both Berlin and Washington. Thus, rather than formally joining the pact envisioned by the Nazis, the Brazilian government prioritized informal collaboration with the Nazi regime in anticommunist initiatives.

The centerpiece of this collaboration was the exchange of intelligence focused on identifying German nationals accused of involvement in the communist uprisings in Brazil. Using information supplied by the Brazilian government about individuals detained in connection with the 1935 uprisings, the Gestapo assisted in identifying those confirmed to be German citizens. Notably, the case of Olga Benário, the partner of Brazilian communist leader Luís Carlos Prestes, stands out, as her identification was decisively facilitated by Hitler's secret police.

The intelligence exchange was followed by technical cooperation initiatives, exemplified by the visit of Captain Miranda Correia, which occurred between March and April of 1937. During his visit, Miranda Correia had the opportunity to inspect Gestapo facilities in Berlin and acquaint himself with the counterintelligence techniques employed by the organization in its efforts to suppress communist agitation. The German-Brazilian collaboration also proved productive in the domain of propaganda, notably through the Third Reich's sharing of materials previously used in anticommunist exhibitions in Germany, facilitating the organization of similar events in Brazil.

The culmination of this process occurred in the second half of 1937, when, using a fabricated communist coup plan, Vargas suspended Brazil's constitutional guarantees and established the Estado Novo dictatorship. The notorious "Cohen Plan" bore several similarities to Nazi propaganda and counterintelligence strategies and was crafted within the fascist *Ação Integralista Brasileira* (AIB), which counted among its leaders individuals sympathetic to the Third Reich.

It is important to underscore that the deepening of cooperation between Brazil and Germany, while rooted in their shared ideological opposition to communism, was significantly driven by the favorable international context of the mid-1930s. This period marked the peak of the United States' commitment to non-intervention in the internal affairs of Latin American countries. Coupled with the isolationist tendencies of the U.S. Congress, this provided Brazil with greater latitude to pursue policies of cooperation and joint action with authoritarian European regimes, most notably Nazi Germany.

However, at the time of the establishment of the Estado Novo in November 1937, these conditions had undergone a profound shift, signaling the beginning of a crisis in Brazil-Germany relations, which characterizes the third phase of the process analyzed in this study. In the international sphere, President Franklin D. Roosevelt's administration adopted a more assertive stance in its relations with Latin America, aiming to counter the growing influence of European authoritarian powers in the region. Meanwhile, on the domestic front, the ideological rift between the Vargas and Hitler regimes started to become more apparent.

By 1937, although anticommunism retained its significance as a mobilizing discourse, communist movements in Brazil no longer constituted a substantial threat to the Vargas grip on power. This development enabled the Brazilian president to reallocate the efforts of his repressive and

propaganda apparatus toward new targets, most notably the ethnic German community residing in Brazil. As a result, the distinction between the racial foundation of Nazi ideology and the civic basis of Vargas's nationalism, which had not obstructed the establishment of the partnership between the two regimes in 1935, became an insurmountable barrier to the continuation of favorable relations and, consequently, to their anticommunist cooperation.

In sum, the analysis demonstrates that anticommunism, far from being a peripheral concern in the bilateral diplomatic agenda between Brazil and Germany, functioned as a key pillar of rapprochement between the two governments, particularly between 1935 and 1937. During this period, ideological alignment was transformed into concrete collaboration, with both governments committing material resources and diplomatic capital to its realization, while benefiting from the specific international conditions of the mid-1930s. However, with the establishment of the Estado Novo and the subsequent realignment of Brazilian foreign policy toward closer ties with the United States, relations between Germany and Brazil entered into crisis, resulting in the collapse of anticommunist cooperation and setting the stage for Brazil and Germany to find themselves on opposing sides during World War II.

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Annex 1

Abstract

The present dissertation discusses the origins and development of anticommunist cooperation between the Brazilian government under Getúlio Vargas and the Third Reich. The analysis identifies that this cooperation underwent three distinct phases between the years 1933 and 1938. The initial phase, covering 1933 and 1934, was marked by the independent implementation of anticommunist policies, with Brazilian authorities drawing inspiration from the Third Reich for the conception of their own authoritarian project. The second phase, spanning 1935 to 1937, represents the peak of anticommunist collaboration between the two regimes, catalyzed by the communist uprisings in Brazil in November 1935. During this period, anticommunism became part of the bilateral diplomatic agenda, leading to cooperation in counterintelligence operations, law enforcement coordination, and the formulation and distribution of anticommunist propaganda. The third phase, from 1937 to 1942, saw the decline of the German-Brazilian anticommunist partnership, eventually leading the former allies to fight on opposite sides during World War II.

Kurzfassung

Die vorliegende Dissertation untersucht die Ursprünge und Entwicklung der antikommunistischen Zusammenarbeit zwischen der brasilianischen Regierung unter Getúlio Vargas und dem Dritten Reich. Die Analyse zeigt, dass diese Zusammenarbeit in den Jahren 1933 bis 1938 drei unterschiedliche Phasen durchlief. Die erste Phase, die die Jahre 1933 und 1934 umfasst, war durch die eigenständige Umsetzung antikommunistischer Maßnahmen gekennzeichnet, wobei die brasilianischen Behörden Inspiration aus dem Dritten Reich für die Konzeption ihres eigenen autoritären Projekts schöpften. Die zweite Phase, die den Zeitraum von 1935 bis 1937 abdeckt, markiert den Höhepunkt der antikommunistischen Zusammenarbeit zwischen den beiden Regimen, ausgelöst durch die kommunistischen Aufstände in Brasilien im November 1935. In dieser Phase wurde der Antikommunismus in die bilaterale diplomatische Agenda aufgenommen, was zur Kooperation in den Bereichen Geheimdienstoperationen, Koordination der Strafverfolgung sowie zur Ausarbeitung und Verbreitung antikommunistischer Propaganda führte. Die dritte Phase, die von 1937 bis 1942 andauerte, kennzeichnete die Krise der deutsch-brasilianischen antikommunistischen Partnerschaft und ebnete den Weg dafür, dass die ehemaligen Verbündeten im Zweiten Weltkrieg auf entgegengesetzten Seiten kämpften.

Annex 2

I, Vinícius Bivar Marra Pereira, hereby declare that I am the sole author of this dissertation and that all excerpts of works published or unpublished have been appropriately cited. I declare, furthermore, that this work has not been published elsewhere neither in its entirety nor in part. I am aware that any infringement of the codes of academic integrity will be considered a violation and thereby result in the dissertation being deemed as “insufficient” to fulfill the requirements for completion of the doctoral degree.

Berlin, October 4, 2024

Vinícius Bivar Marra Pereira