

‘War on War’: Anarchists in Brazil in The Face of the Two World Wars¹

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to investigate anarchist positions and initiatives in Brazil during the First and Second World Wars, following the transformations of their proposals and policies, primarily through their journals, meetings, and congress resolutions, as well as official police documents from the period. We also seek to analyse anarchist propaganda and militancy within labour environments and among left-wing currents in the country, in connection with debates and positions from other parts of the world, approached from a transnational perspective. We examine how these revolutionary actors contributed to shaping workers’ internationalism, as well as anti-fascist, anti-authoritarian, and self-management ideas and practices, which provided a counterpoint to the hegemonic ideologies and policies of the period.

Keywords: *Anarchism, Brazil, anti-fascism, internationalism*

INTRODUCTION

The global conflicts of the twentieth century, known as the First World War (Great War) and the Second World War, caused intense transformations in society as well as in the labour movement among its various ideological and political currents. Various militants, activists and intellectuals, including republicans, socialists, trade unionists, anarchists and others, had to devise different strategies, tactics and even profound reformulations of their theories due to the major economic, social and political changes that these events caused in the world.²

This article aims to investigate anarchist positions and articulations in Brazil during the First and Second World Wars, following the transformations of their proposals and policies, mainly in their journals, meetings and congress resolutions, as well as police documents from the period. In the first decades of the twentieth century, 'anarchism was an important chapter in the history of political thought and action in Brazil' and with syndicalism and socialism 'shaped the workers' movement in a number of ways and also influenced a range of workers' social'.³

Anarchism, both in theory and practice, sought to construct and advocate for a new model of political, social, and economic organisation. Activists who identified as libertarian socialists opposed the expansion of the capitalist system of production, the rigidity of national borders, statist centralism, and what they perceived as religious and cultural alienation. According to Felipe Corrêa, 'anarchism is a libertarian and anti-authoritarian form of revolutionary socialism, a form of socialism that is simultaneously anti-capitalist and anti-statist'.⁴ Guided by an internationalist vision, these activists believed that their resistance and victories could not be confined to a single nation or ethnic group. Instead, they sought the overthrow of those controlling the means of production and wielding political power, envisioning a global revolution as the ultimate goal.⁵ Many anarchists, driven by the need to flee persecution, economic necessity, or the desire to disseminate their ideas, traversed countries and continents. In doing so, they brought with them diverse perspectives and experiences, enriching the anarchist movement and expanding its reach beyond the North Atlantic and European contexts. Their efforts spoke to a universal aspiration for fraternity, contributing to the development of anarchism as a truly global phenomenon.⁶

Many anarchists were active by means of the press, driven by industrial transformations in printing techniques. With the great waves of migration, they were able to establish various channels of communication within working class spaces, expanding the reach and circulation of their ideas. Some of these newspapers had print runs in the thousands, such as *La Protesta Humana* (The Human Protest) (1897) in Argentina, *Freedom* (1886) in England and *A Plebe* (The Plebs) (1917) in Brazil.⁷

Anarchists also influenced various workers' organisations, including mutual aid societies and trade unions. In Argentina, for example, the Regional Workers' Federation of Argentina (FORA), had a strong anarchist influence and thousands of members and, in the United States, the Industrial Workers of the World and 'Syndicalism (sometimes known as "revolutionary syndicalism" or "revolu-

tionary industrial unionism”) emerged as a coherent doctrine in the 1890s and 1900s, primarily under the influence of anarchist labour activists.⁸

In the case of Brazil, the anarchists exerted a significant influence, alongside other revolutionary political currents, through a libertarian workers’ press, in the creation of rationalist schools, such as the Modern School, and in the organisation of trade union spaces, such as the Brazilian Workers’ Confederation. They were also at the forefront of important strikes and insurrectionary movements, such as the General Strike of 1917 and the Anarchist Insurrection of 1918. Guided by their internationalist goals and supported by their migratory networks, anarchists maintained contact and collaboration with activists from different parts of the world, reinforcing the global dimension of their struggles and ideals. The Italian anarchist newspaper *La Battaglia* (The Battle) in São Paulo had a communication network with the Italian diaspora around the world, such as in the United States and Argentina, for example, while *Aktion* (Action) was part of the German community in the city of Porto Alegre, corresponding with its fellow countrymen. The newspaper *A Plebe* (The Plebs), on the other hand, reported news and connections between Portugal, Spain, Uruguay, Chile, Russia and many others.⁹

In many places, anarchists also joined the ranks of anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggles. Some of them accepted the contradiction of a struggle that could liberate a people dominated by a great power leading to a Republic, others, however, as Lucien Van der Walt and Steven Hirsch point out, believed that they could shape these struggles towards global solidarity and Social Revolution.¹⁰ In this way, anarchist militants, anchored by their internationalist visions, but also driven by mass migrations, were marked by the development of groups and networks in various locations around the world. This intense mobility also made these anarchists or socialists absorb the agendas of each locality, helping anarchism to be internationalist in its own practice. Of course, this did not cancel out the contradiction of mobilising the transit of implicit ethnocentric or nationalist ideas of the travelling activists.¹¹

Because of this, anarchism and its dynamics have been studied extensively by transnational and global historiographical currents. Several works bring together chapters that highlight the efforts of this approach, such as those by Steven Hirsch and Lucien Van der Walt,¹² David Berry and Constance Bantman,¹³ as well as Marcel Van der Linden.¹⁴

This article locates itself within this debate by exploring the mediations (between the national and international) carried out by anarchist militants,

the work of their press, and the role of trade union and political bodies in this process. In this sense, the case of the anarchists in Brazil in the face of the world wars – events which would change borders, economies and which influenced the decisions and political articulations of nation states – can offer contributions to this historiography.

ECONOMIC PRESSURES AND ANARCHIST INITIATIVES IN THE FACE OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR

Numerous countries, even outside the conflicts and trenches of the Great War, were affected by the economic pressures resulting from the event. During this period, Brazil's economy was predominantly based on agricultural export and focused on coffee. With investments focused on the conflicts, there was a consequent drop in the country's export of various products, sharply increasing inflation.¹⁵

Since the end of the nineteenth century, the workers' movement had expanded considerably along with the growth and industrialisation of various cities, such as São Paulo, Santos, Rio de Janeiro and Porto Alegre. Various organisations were created, resulting in the creation of the Brazilian Workers' Confederation (COB) in 1906, first comprising an articulation of the Rio de Janeiro Workers' Federation (FORJ), the Santos Local Workers' Federation (FOLS), and the São Paulo Workers' Federation (FOSP), but soon after expanding to several other regions of Brazil. The participants, which united socialists, trade unionists and anarchists, proudly assumed that 'with this the first step is taken towards the awakening of the proletariat of Brazil and the foundations are laid for a future organization, made of a common agreement and a determined purpose'.¹⁶ With this intention, from 1906 onward, they mobilised in the struggle, following a trend of the global labour movement, for the eight-hour workday.

Between 1911 and 1913, several strikes broke out in the construction sector, accompanied by labour actions in other regions as well – such as in the village of Ribeirão Pires, in April and May of 1913. In 1912, a partial stoppage in the shoe industry in São Paulo grew into a major mobilisation involving around 10,000 workers. Militants attempted to support and expand the movement through news coverage and continued coordination efforts.¹⁷ For some authors, this behaviour changed considerably in the four years that followed, before the

intense unrest of 1917. Researcher Sheldon Maram argues that the workers' movement suffered a clear decline as a result of the police's continuous repression of demonstrations and organisations, together with the constant unemployment that swept through the industrial centres, causing instability in the lives of the population and, consequently, the difficulty of unionisation due to the constant layoffs and mobility of workers.¹⁸

During this period, socialist, anarchist and syndicalist groups invested heavily in their press, as well as in the formation of workers' leagues and political and ideological groupings, in an attempt to promote workers' mobilisations. Despite the strong internationalist propaganda, many of these groups remained concentrated in the colonies and immigrant neighbourhoods, facing difficulties in drawing up programmes that considered the Brazilian reality. To get around this obstacle, they made trips to cities in the interior.¹⁹

Prominent socialist activists included Alceste de Ambris, Teodoro Monicelli, Giovanni Scala, Emilio Pastore, Fosco Pardini and others, who orbited around the periodicals *Avanti!* (*Come On!*) (the organ of the Italian Socialist Party) and *La Scure* (The Axe).²⁰ Anarchists included Edgard Leuenroth, Benjamin Mota, Neno Vasco, Manoel Moscoso and Maria A. Soares, who published the newspapers *O Amigo do Povo* (The Friend of the People), *A Terra Livre* (The Free Land) and *A Lanterna* (The Lantern). In addition, libertarian Italian immigrants such as Alessandro Cerchiai, Angelo Bandoni, Oreste Ristori and Gigi Damiani published *La Battaglia* (The Battle), later renamed *La Barricata* (The Barricade) and then *La Propaganda Libertaria* (The Libertarian Propaganda).²¹

Anarchists were divided in their strategic approaches. On one side were those who advocated for and actively promoted revolutionary syndicalism through the creation of militant trade union organisations – figures like Florentino de Carvalho being among the most prominent supporters. On the other, there were those who distrusted more consolidated structures, preferring to act in more mobile and flexible groups, a position defended by Oreste Ristori. A third perspective, represented by José Oiticica and Neno Vasco, sought to organise anarchist ideological groups, such as parties and alliances, to act in a more coordinated way within the syndicalist milieu, preventing its tendency towards reformism. In any case, with the reflux of the workers' movement and the increase in the cost of living, the anarchists used various spaces to spread their libertarian socialist ideals, exerting great influence on the anti-militarist movement in various regions of the country.²²

In 1915, the Italian group in São Paulo launched a new newspaper titled *La Guerra Sociale* (*The Social War*), later slightly renamed, *Guerra Sociale* (*Social War*), published in Portuguese and Italian. They reaffirmed their anarchist and revolutionary positions as a preparation for an anticapitalist revolution, equally opposed to exploitation in factories and statist powers.²³ Starting in 1913 with *La Propaganda Libertaria*, the main theme was the beginning of the Balkan wars and the context of the First World War. For them, world conflicts were part of a scenario that would explain the 'interests of capital: rivalry, the appetite of different financial groups, colonial expansionism, statism, nationalism, all its institutions and all its morals, based on violence', all of which were not a 'curse of an evil god, now cynical and fierce, but of a social order'.²⁴ In this sense, not only internationalism was highlighted but also the specificities of the native working class and racial oppression:

The aspirations that animated the combatants for the extinction of the slavery of men of color were great and generous, but, in reality, the cursed slavery of the proletarian masses has not yet been abolished. In fact, colored men continue to be regarded as slaves, as beasts [...] This list also includes the indigenous, inhabitants of the sertões [backlands], who are victims of the ferocity of national or foreign slavers, types without guts, who with the help of henchmen and legal forces massacre these poor people.²⁵

Another important periodical in this sense was *Na Barricada* (*On the Barricade*), from Rio de Janeiro, initially published in 1915 by militants José Oiticica, Fábio Luz, Hermes Fontes and run by Orlando Corrêa Lopes. The anarchists reported on strikes and movements in the city and the country, as well as news of international mobilisations. For them, 'wars, all wars from nation to nation, always result in the benefit of the capitalist and government classes and always to the detriment of the working classes, of the people in general'.²⁶

In the anarchists' analysis, although a very important factor, the wars were not the direct result of economic interests, but how the bourgeoisie and those in political power used the configuration of the state and the use of nationalism and patriotism, as well as religious fundamentalism, to divide all peoples, hindering international solidarity, a precept that was indispensable for the organisation of society. The anarchists tried to dismantle the jingoism with the military issue, which involved many young working-class people, by trying to reveal the interests of the bourgeoisie and the rulers. Thus,

Despite the patriotic hymns, the nationalist eloquence and the civic enthusiasm, one can see through the haze of this apparently disinterested propaganda the real and sensible fact that the army is an institution at the service of the big capitalists, serving as a guarantee for their unbridled exploitation and plundering, repelling the complaints of the exploited with bayonets and bullets [...] Let us fight titanically for the victory of our cause, which is the cause of freedom, justice and civilization.²⁷

With this, the periodical *Guerra Sociale*, followed by the periodical *Na Barricada* and the anticlerical periodical *A Lanterna*, reported on the search for internationalist bodies, congresses and events related to bringing Latin or South American groups together for the anti-militarist struggle. It was from this perspective, and from this redefinition of anarchist and syndicalist tactics, that it was possible to build the South American Anarchist Congress and the International Peace Congress, proposed by these groups and by the Brazilian Workers' Confederation, which was active again in 1913.

THE INTERNATIONAL PEACE CONGRESS AND THE SOUTH AMERICAN ANARCHIST CONGRESS

Identifying themselves as internationalists, anarchists, socialists and syndicalists sought practical unity across borders to tackle global conflicts. This exchange was strengthened by the work of militants who moved between different countries, such as the anarchist Neno Vasco, who was involved in the mutual construction of the workers' movement in Brazil and Portugal.²⁸ Furthermore, the Zimmerwald Manifesto, launched in Switzerland by socialist leaders in 1915, called for joint left-wing action against the war. The document was reported in the Brazilian workers' press, broadening the debate on international solidarity among workers.²⁹

Several workers' periodicals used the slogan 'War on War'. The periodical *Na Barricada* stirred up the working class by saying 'enough with the killing',³⁰ showing that incisive attitudes were needed on the part of workers and subaltern groups against those responsible for national conflicts and their global consequences. They also denounced the repression of transnational and internationalist anarchist and syndicalist groups and projects. In this context, the International Peace Congress in Spain and the London Anarchist Congress, both planned for 1914, could not take place. The new restrictions on the movement

of militants and journals between countries, coupled with the intensification of repression, made it unviable for them to be held.³¹

In September 1915, the Brazilian Workers' Confederation (COB), through the periodical *A Voz do Trabalhador* (The Voice of the Worker), and the anarchist periodical *Na Barricada*, reported on the International Peace Congress, scheduled for 14, 15 and 16 October in Rio de Janeiro. For the militants and editors of the organs, this event would be an 'international meeting of socialists, trade unionists and anarchists to discuss the means of opposing the tremendous European war'. They also stressed that 'an agreement between the revolutionary forces of the international proletariat would be unquestionably effective in bringing about the end of the disgraceful carnage',³² thus justifying their efforts.

The Congress was attended by workers' federations linked to the Regional Workers' Federation of Argentina (FORA) and the Brazilian Workers' Confederation (COB), as well as various groups of social, economic and political organisation. These include the Center for Social Studies in Rio de Janeiro, the Young Idealists Women's Center in São Paulo, the Renewal Anarchist Group in Santos, the collectives around the periodicals *La Protesta* (The Protest) and *La Rebelión* (The Rebellion) in Argentina, the Anarchist Communist Union in Portugal, the Anarchist Education Group in Spain, the Weaving Workers' Class Union and the Union of Syndicalist Youth from Portugal, the Confederación Confederation of Workers' Unions of the Mexican Republic, the Italian Syndicalist Union and the Socialist Party from Argentina, among others.³³

Disagreeing with influential anarchist militants such as Piotr Kropotkin, who declared his support for the Allies with the 'Manifesto of the Sixteen',³⁴ the South American anarchists, in line with the majority libertarian position in the world, declared their anti-militarist and pacifist positions in their periodicals, and were able to influence the debates at this congress. In this sense, the documents of the event affirmed the internationalist class struggle as the only way out for workers in the face of the event, since 'war obeys the ambitions of capitalists and politicians'. Thus, one of the Congress's recommendations for the organisations and groups involved was:

- 1 – Protest against war and the militarisation of youth and childhood; 2 – Carry out a campaign aimed at making hierarchical, religious and nationalist prejudices disappear from the minds and hearts of the proletariat; 3 – Promote a permanent revolt until the last vestiges of the current institutions are destroyed; 4 – Declare that their aspirations are embodied in the

highest ideals aimed at achieving a social revolution, so that a true stage of progress, freedom and universal civilisation can begin as soon as possible.³⁵

The anarchists seized the opportunity to strengthen the links with their political group and held the South American Anarchist Congress between 17 and 19 October, at the headquarters of the Center for Social Studies in Rio de Janeiro. The event was attended by a significant number of organisations and militants, mostly from Brazil and Argentina, but also from Uruguay, including the editors of the journal *La Protesta* (The Protest), who represented the Regional Workers' Federation of Argentina (FORA), as well as members of the Committee for Prisoners and Deportees, the Anarchist Group to Prepare, the Orientation Anarchist Group, from Buenos Aires, and various individual militants. From Brazil, we can highlight the Young Idealists Women's Center, the Iconoclasts Group from Pelotas, the Renovation Group from Santos, the Libertarian Group of Ribeirão Pires, among others. One of the key points was the need for an exchange of relations between the anarchist groups in the various Latin American countries, and committees were set up in the respective countries to this end.

Despite the failure to establish an organisation with continental or trans-national reach, the events were fundamental in defining anarchist strategies in the workers' movement. Among them, 'the tenacious propaganda in all Latin American countries [...] of the anarchist doctrine' stands out.³⁶ Another intense debate revolved around the relationship between revolutionary unions and anarchist ideology. For some, these unions should be directly linked to anarchism, while others argued that they should remain neutral, acting only as bodies to demand the economic interests of the working class. The agreed solution was a third way: the creation of anarchist organisations to act within revolutionary syndicalism. In this way, on the one hand, revolutionary syndicalism would remain a space for defending the material interests of the class, without political and ideological divisions; on the other, anarchists could organise internally, promoting libertarian ideals both inside and outside these structures.

These organisational debates, together with the influence of the Russian Revolution, drove the adoption of libertarian methods in various mass mobilisations, such as the 1917 General Strike in São Paulo and the 1918 Anarchist Insurrection in Rio de Janeiro. In this context, revolutionary syndicalism was accompanied by more programmatic anarchist groups, such as the Anarchist Alliance and the Anarchist Communist Party, as well as negotiating bodies such as the Proletarian Defense Committee. Periodicals that sought to report on and

connect these insurrections also gained prominence, such as *A Plebe*, run by anarchist militant Edgard Leuenroth.³⁷

THE EMERGENCE OF FASCISM BETWEEN THE WARS AND THE ACTIVITIES OF ANARCHIST MILITANTS

After the 1920s, political repression against anarchist militants intensified, resulting in expulsions and even the creation of a penal colony for political prisoners in the north of the country.³⁸ The libertarian movement was also impacted by the rise of bolshevism, which led many of its organisations to become parties aligned with the politics of the USSR. In this context, revolutionary syndicalism itself underwent transformations, as the communist tendency sought to hegemonise the Bolshevik programme within workers' organisations. At the same time, new movements began to gain ground on the streets and attract followers, such as corporatist unionism and 'tenentism',³⁹ which began to compete for influence on the political and social scene.

Even so, anarchists sought alliances to counter the rise of fascist ideas and practices in the interwar period. The periodical *Alba Rossa (Red Dawn)*, created in 1919 by Angelo Bandoni, tried to rebuild an internationalist and anti-militarist struggle. This close connection with the Italian network around the world, as well as the criticism of the post-war nationalist wave, catapulted the group of Italian anarchists and socialists to the forefront of the first anti-fascist organisational efforts in Brazil. The periodical *Alba Rossa* stated in 1922:

that if these disqualified, unprofessional people have the courage to come among us, authentic workers, children of all countries, to speak about Italian fascism; ... then we will use the appropriate means to persuade them otherwise and convince them that the fascist's place is among the mercenaries ... tyrants ... enemies of the people.⁴⁰

In this way, Oreste Ristori and Alessandro Cerchiai began, in 1927, their collaboration with the periodical *La Difesa (The Defence)*. This newspaper was already founded in 1923 and defined itself as 'socialist and antifascist' and is considered the starting point of anti-fascism in Brazil.⁴¹ Originally proposed by Antonio Piccarolo – a member of the Italian Socialist Party (PSI) and director of *Avanti!* in São Paulo – the initiative was later led by Francisco Frola, who radicalised its revolutionary

discourse through collaboration with anarchists and communists such as Goffredo Rosini and Ertulio Esposito. Since 1924, socialists had been creating anti-fascist organisations, beginning with the Democratic Union of Rio de Janeiro, founded by Giovanni Infante and Giovanni Scala, both of whom had previously collaborated with anarchists in rationalist schools. Subsequently, other organisations emerged, including the International League for Democratic Defense in Belo Horizonte and the Giacomo Matteotti Association in São Paulo.⁴²

Despite having criticisms, anarchists tried to establish a broad social force to confront repression and the emergence of fascist ideas among the working class. They participated, critically and with reservations, in the actions of the United Anti-fascist Front (FUA) in São Paulo, which tried to expand nationally through its constituent organs. The FUA, founded through the initiative of socialists around the Trotskyist Internationalist Communist League and the Brazilian Socialist Party (PSB) was discussed at the headquarters of the Graphic Workers Union, which in the period had a Trotskyist majority.⁴³

They also accompanied the National Liberation Alliance (ALN), an anti-fascist agglutination proposed and officially established on 30 March 1935, at the João Caetano Theatre in Rio de Janeiro. On 29 June 1935, in the hall of the Spanish Federation, anarchists, including Edgard Leuenroth, Florentino de Carvalho and Gusmão Soler, proposed a conference with the presence of ‘aliancistas’ (members of the Alliance) to leave their positions to the organisation, which were then officially agreed by the São Paulo Workers’ Federation. However, for them,

[...] as long as the *aliancistas* are in opposition, fighting fascism, landlordism and government tyranny [...] not deifying people, but fighting for ideas, arguing and fighting around principles, anarchists and *aliancistas* will find themselves side by side.⁴⁴

Refusing programmatic integration with these organisations, but accepting tactical alliances, the anarchists, along with other anti-fascist groups, confronted fascist and ‘integralista’ attacks in workers’ spaces. The Brazilian Integralist Action was founded in 1932 by Brazilian writer and journalist Plínio Salgado. The movement promoted an ultranationalist and conservative ideology characteristic of the fascist movements of the era, even incorporating religious elements from the Catholic Church to legitimise its doctrine. ‘Integralistas’ also exhibited a certain syncretism with Brazilian national symbols, such as the use of the word

'Anauê' in their texts and speeches. Derived from the indigenous Tupi language, 'Anauê' meant 'you are my brother' and was strategically linked to Brazil's patriarchal traditions, reinforcing extreme nationalism and antisemitism. Sometimes, 'integralistas' violently attacked left-wing or trade union spaces and activists, which resulted in the gathering of anarchists, socialists, anti-fascists and revolutionary syndicalists, who tried to prevent 'integralista' rallies, often marked by clashes. One of these events, in the city of São Paulo, was known as the 'Revoada dos Galinhas Verdes' (Flying of the Green Hens).⁴⁵

Libertarian militants also tried to campaign against anti-Semitism and racism. In its 13 May 1933 edition, for example, the newspaper *A Plebe* reported that the anarchist thinker and activist Maria Lacerda de Moura had sent a letter of support to the Israeli Committee of Rio de Janeiro, in which she stated a 'deep repugnance for the ignoble processes of German fascism stupidly persecuting the Israelis'.⁴⁶ During this period, there was the case of Genny Gleiser, a young Jewish communist deported by the Vargas government to be handed over to the Romanian government. The anarchist Maria Lacerda de Moura vehemently defended the militant, while anarchist periodicals such as *A Plebe* and *A Lanterna* closely followed the unfolding of the case. Genny managed to escape and flee to Paris, mobilising socialist and libertarian networks in her support.

Regarding racism against black people in the country, the anarchists tried to show that 'there are no inferior races, there are customs, racial characteristics. There are cultural differences' and that 'black people are just as proud, noble and strong as white, yellow or red people'.⁴⁷ Following this path, the newspaper *A Plebe* launched a campaign in 1933 to support the Black Legion Benevolent Association. The anarchists showed solidarity by noting that black people were often used on the front line in various conflicts and wars.

With a view to their campaigns and positions, despite the adversities, the anarchists sought to keep their periodicals active, including *A Plebe*, *A Lanterna*, *Guerra Sociale*, *O Trabalho* (The Labour), *O Trabalhador Vidreiro* (The Glassworker), *I Quaderni della Libertà* (The Notebooks of Freedom) and *Aktion*. In addition to their press efforts, they invested in creating and maintaining their own social and anti-fascist spaces, such as the Ateneu of Scientific and Social Studies and the Terra Livre Libertarian Center in São Paulo; the Center of Culture in João Pessoa; the Free Group for Social Action and the Social Propaganda Group in Recife; and the Sacco and Vanzetti Libertarian Group in Piauí, among others. One of the most important spaces for libertarian action during this period was the São Paulo Social Culture Center, created by militants

linked to the São Paulo Workers' Federation. As well as promoting lectures and training activities, the centre became a meeting point for political debates and the expression of anti-fascism, bringing together different ideological currents in the fight against authoritarianism.⁴⁸ Another very important space was the International Library, built by German immigrants Friedrich Kniestedt and Elisa Augusta Hedwig in the city of Porto Alegre. This space was more than just a place to read, it became an important meeting place for debates, organisations, conferences and parties, bringing together anti-fascists from different political groups.⁴⁹

Furthermore, libertarian militants continued to invest in revolutionary syndicalist organisations, in particular the São Paulo Workers' Federation. They were also active through the Federation of Anti-Political Proletarian Nuclei of Porto Alegre, the General Construction Union of Recife and the Workers' Federation of Paraná. Until 1935, these entities still exerted influence among workers in various categories, such as construction workers, metalworkers, shoemakers, printers and others.⁵⁰

In April 1934, the newspaper *A Plebe* reported a strike and broad mobilisation of '22,000 workers of the Leopoldina Railway [...] against the reactionary will of the Ministry of Labour'.⁵¹ Reporting on a strike of various categories in the city of Santos in the same year, the newspaper *A Plebe* also reported that 'having exhausted the successive and legal channels, having exhausted proletarian patience, the workers are concentrating, combining defence measures'. The idea was that, through strikes, base assemblies, and other combative syndicalist methods, they could rebuild a combative unionism again with 'the workers, aware of their rights, cohesive, united in a single bloc'.⁵²

Internationalism continued to be an important goal for anarchist militants. We can mention the link with the American Continental Association of Workers (ACAT), founded in 1929, which sought to organise anarchists and revolutionary syndicalists from various Latin American countries, such as Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay. Among other organisations cited by libertarian militants, we can mention the International Workers' Association (IWA-AIT) founded in 1922 in Germany, the Goteborg Group of Anarchist-Esperantists in Sweden, the National Confederation of Labour (CNT) in Spain and the Argentine Regional Workers' Federation (FORA).⁵³

Alongside the union work, there was also the political project, albeit a minority one, of uniting specifically anarchist tendencies and groups. The militant José Oiticica, writing in the periodical *A Plebe*, quotes the 'great

comrade Nestor Makhno' who warned of the 'need to create a powerful organisation, capable of bringing [...] all the anarchist forces together and organising a movement as a whole, coherent and aware of the goal to be achieved', which was the example for the proposal of a 'Brazilian Anarchist Federation'.⁵⁴ This project failed to materialise, but it reveals the concern of militants with anarchist political organisation at a national level, starting with the Relations Committee of Anarchist Groups of São Paulo and the Social Action Group.

A prominent editor and militant in these periodicals was Edgard Leuenroth. Born in Mogi Mirim in 1881, he was the son of a German-speaking immigrant and a Brazilian woman. After the death of his father, his family moved to the Brás neighbourhood, in the capital of São Paulo, where they faced financial difficulties. It was in this environment that Leuenroth became acquainted with the intricacies of working-class neighbourhoods and their political activities, coming into contact with socialist and anarchist ideas through the Socialist Circle and his activities as a printer. He became one of the main organisers of the São Paulo Workers' Federation (FOSP) and, later, of the Brazilian Workers' Confederation (COB). He played an important role in the workers' and libertarian press, founding and participating in various organisations linked to the sector, such as the São Paulo Typographical Center, the Graphic Workers' Union, the Paulista Press Association and the National Press Federation (Brazil).⁵⁵

Leuenroth was active in several publications, including *O Alfa* (Alpha), *A Terra Livre* (The Free Land), *A Lucta Proletária* (The Proletarian Struggle), *A Guerra Social* (The Social War), *O Povo* (The People), *A Capital* (Capital), among others. He was arrested on several occasions, including his arrest during the 1917 general strike, accused of involvement through his participation in the Proletarian Defence Committee. Despite facing repression, Edgard Leuenroth maintained his anarchist and syndicalist activities during the 1930s and 1940s, remaining active until the 1960s, leaving an important legacy for social and libertarian movements in Brazil.⁵⁶

In their own spaces and in the anarchist press, libertarian militants sought to analyse fascist ideas and practices which, in their view, were connected to social issues stemming not only from the First World War – such as the crisis of the capitalist system itself – but also from patriotic propaganda, the expansion of the statist political system, and the influence of religious institutions. Other elements were also seen as a reaction by the ruling classes after various revolutions and insurrections around the world. From this point of view, to 'maintain order', the bourgeoisie and the state resorted to measures aimed at suppressing 'all

the tendencies towards progress and social improvements aroused by the working masses',⁵⁷ as the newspaper *A Plebe* pointed out. Thus, 'fascism brings to the capitalist world a solution to its internal crisis [...]: economically, a series of formulas; politically, maximum authoritarianism'.⁵⁸

During this period, the libertarian press also published texts on the role of the left in this process and its crises in failing to contain capitalism, as well as being an element in the growth of fascism. Analysing the rise of Nazism in Germany, the periodical *A Plebe* argued, in 1933, that 'the parties of the left showed an astonishing incapacity, impotence, insipience. They have built a democratic constitution on paper, which is useless to discuss here, but they preserve capitalism'.⁵⁹

This approach was also used to interpret the conflicts that preceded the Second World War. For them, 'this fever of nationalism that is now convulsing the states of all countries leads fatally to the delirium of war, as is happening in Italy and Germany, where the exploitation of patriotism [...] has become obligatory',⁶⁰ as was pointed out in *A Plebe*. In 1935, the journal *Guerra Social*e closely followed Italy's war against Ethiopia under the Mussolini regime. The editors warned that the conflict and occupation would bring harm not only to the Ethiopian people, but also to the Italian and global working class. Reaffirming their position, they declared: 'We anti-fascists must oppose the preparation for war with all our strength'.⁶¹

DICTATORSHIPS, CORPORATISM AND THE SECOND WORLD WAR IN THE FACE OF THE ANARCHISTS

In the 1930s, the corporatist project of President Getúlio Vargas, following the example of several countries – recognising the trade union and linking it to the state apparatus, while at the same time creating mechanisms of repression against anarchist, communist and socialist militants – severely affected the workers' movement as a whole. Getúlio Vargas took over the Provisional Government in 1930, supported by the army and political leaders from Minas Gerais and Rio Grande do Sul. Assumed to be a revolution by the opponents of the oligarchies (which included many workers' groups), Vargas took the stance of a great leader, combining an increase in the strength of the state, thus barring social struggles through repression after the repression unleashed with the 'Intentona Comunista' (communist attempt) in 1935.⁶² Jover Telles argues that 'in the years of the Estado

Novo (New State), the government's interventionist action helped strengthen the reformist current in the unions'.⁶³

In fact, this was a period of significant decline for revolutionary currents within the Brazilian labour movement. However, between 1939 and 1945, various indications show that anarchists did not completely cease their activities, although they were also severely affected by repression. To preserve ideological principles and discuss action strategies, active libertarian militants founded a clandestine space called Our Farm ('Nossa Chácara'), located in the countryside of São Paulo. Even so, the libertarians' main strategy was to promote and distribute, in public spaces, the international libertarian and anti-fascist press, which remained active and published in other countries. During this period, the São Paulo police arrested the militant Benedito Romano with 'copies of the newspapers *El Obrero Gráfico* (The Graphic Worker) (Argentina), *La Protesta* (The Protest) (Argentina), *Cultura Proletária* (Proletarian Culture) (New York, in Spanish) and *L'Adunata dei Refrattari* (The Call of the Refractories) (New York, in Italian)'. The militant, questioned by the police, also said that he distributed 'the newspapers among his closest friends who always meet at the Café São Paulo in Praça da Sé or at the Café Acadêmico in Rua Direita'.⁶⁴

During the same period, Francisco Cianci was also arrested for distributing the periodical *L'Adunata dei Refrattari* (The Call of the Refractories) and for having numerous other anti-fascist, anarchist and anti-clerical periodicals and materials in his home. For the São Paulo police, the militant was 'a dangerous anarchist, leader of the São Paulo Workers' Federation' who 'constantly makes propaganda against the bourgeois capitalist regime and the Armando Salles government, calling it fascist!'⁶⁵

The militants in the country also continued to support organisations from their networks in other countries. In 1939, the newspaper *A Liberdade* (The Freedom), which had Portuguese exiles in France and was helping anarchists and anti-fascists in the Spanish revolutionary process, reported receiving donations from Brazil.⁶⁶

During this period, we can also follow the trajectory of immigrants and political exiles, such as the Portuguese Roberto das Neves. An active militant and journalist, he collaborated with periodicals such as *A Comuna* (The Commune) and *A Batalha* (The Battle), standing out as a staunch opponent of Salazar's government. Between 1926 and 1931, he was arrested several times for his political activities. Roberto das Neves moved between France and Spain, getting involved with various organisations. During the revolutionary process in Spain,

he took an active part in various initiatives, including organising a ship to transport hundreds of refugees from the Spanish Civil War to Mexico. As repression worsened and the counter-revolutionary process advanced, Roberto das Neves moved to France and later to Brazil. In 1945, he was one of the organisers and militants of the Portuguese Anti-Fascist Committee and the Libertarian Action Group, as well as being one of the main promoters of Germinal Publishing, consolidating his contribution to anti-fascist and anarchist struggles.⁶⁷

We can still see internationalist and anti-militarist propaganda in the foreign and national newspapers distributed by anarchists in working class areas. Until 1939, the Spanish Revolution represented this effort and was followed and reported in all libertarian periodicals. According to Morris Brodie, 'their revolutionary achievements had transnational appeal, and inspired a new generation of activists to join the movement'.⁶⁸ As it was an event that, in some regions, had a strong presence of anarchist militants and organisations, as well as symbolising anti-fascist unity, anarchist editors made a point of publicising that the 'red and black flag will fly in all factories and workplaces as a manifestation of the firm and proletarian revolutionary will to take the reins of their own destiny directly into their own hands'.⁶⁹

In May 1940, the Argentine newspaper *La Protesta*, which also circulated in Brazil, ran a headline entitled 'Workers of the World' asserting the need for an international workers' union against 'the modern domination of inquisitorial regimes'.⁷⁰ During this period, the policy implementing national statism was being denounced.⁷¹ In 1937, there was another political coup by Getúlio Vargas, legitimising a dictatorial policy, further intensifying political repression and suppressing the right to a free press, which was regulated by the Department of Press and Propaganda (DIP) in 1939.

In this period, most historiography marks the disappearance of anarchism from the workers' movement in Brazil. John Dulles, for example, marks the end of his analysis of the activities of communists and anarchists in Brazil: fascism was leading society towards 'bloody barbarism', destroying countries and killing workers with the Second World War. In this case, according to *La Protesta* (The Protest), 'from stubborn parliamentary socialism to truculent bolshevism, all used the workers to achieve their bastard ambitions', resulting in 'absolute demoralisation to present a serious battle against the criminal Nazi regime'.⁷²

As a result of a crisis in the capitalist order, as well as nationalist, statist and authoritarian pretensions, including those related to the Church, the anarchists' proposal in the face of the Second World War revolved around propaganda, on the one hand, about the ineffectiveness of statist and national proposals

to put an end to fascism, and, on the other, in calling for the strengthening of self-managing social, trade union and political spaces – although intensely damaged in this respect. During this period, various individual violent actions, ‘propaganda by the deed’, resurfaced against fascist and authoritarian personalities.⁷³ Nevertheless, various anarchist periodicals published by anarchists in Brazil stressed the need for collective organisation. In 1945, the ‘Libertarian Communist Organization of Brazil’ emerged to ‘combat the exploitation and oppression of man by man, [...] by instituting courses in social culture, [...] through the adoption, by the unions, of direct syndicalist action’.⁷⁴

Thus, despite being severely weakened, there were various libertarian actions to maintain the continuity of anarchist proposals and practices. With the political opening in 1945, anarchist periodicals resurfaced quickly, including *O Trabalhador Graphico* (The Graphic Worker), the reactivation of *A Plebe* in São Paulo, *Remodelações* (Remodellings) and *Ação Direta* (Direct Action) in Rio de Janeiro and new organisations such as the Libertarian Action Group, the Libertarian Communist Organization of Brazil and others, accompanying social and cultural spaces and trying to accompany the strikes and the reconstruction of the workers’ movement.⁷⁵

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The period between the two World Wars was marked by profound transformations and challenges for militants, activists and journalists linked to the labour and trade union movement in various parts of the world. For many researchers, the First World War represented the first major crisis for anarchists.⁷⁶ Later, with the rise of fascist movements, of corporatism and national-statism, as well as the closing of various borders and the hegemony of the Russian Revolution within the left, the anarchist movement suffered irreparable losses.

In the case of Brazil, although connected to a transnational and global movement, it is possible to see the anarchists’ efforts in influencing the working class from an internationalist, anti-militarist perspective aimed at developing practices of self-managing socialism. In addition, they represented an important counterpoint to authoritarian and fascist ideologies, forming part of a broader anti-fascist movement, articulated with other groups.

During the First World War, anarchist action was decisive in influencing the workers’ movement, both in Brazil and in other parts of the world, reaffirming the

defence of universal fraternity, combined with the ideals of class struggle. They sought to unite workers globally against those in political and economic power. In addition to propaganda, anarchists actively participated in the organisation of events with a global impact, the creation of transnational syndicalist and political bodies and the promotion of revolutionary processes in different regions.

In Brazil, as in other countries, anarchists quickly understood the fascist threat and tried to establish fronts of resistance to contain its rise. However, they faced difficulties in the face of the growth of corporate unionism, Bolshevik influence and political repression during the dictatorship in the context of the Second World War. Even so, they insisted on circulating the foreign press – made possible by the anarchists’ practical internationalism, even in times of crisis and border closures – and maintained an intense internal political, theoretical and ideological debate. These initiatives made it possible to preserve anarchism for future generations, ensuring that its ideas and tools of struggle would continue to offer alternatives for the left and the working class, in opposition to nation states, capitalism and authoritarian religious orders, always in defence of a libertarian, self-managing and internationalist socialism.

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NOTES

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