



The war behind the scenes (1906)

Leandro do Carmo Quintão
Instituto Federal do Espírito Santo (IFES)



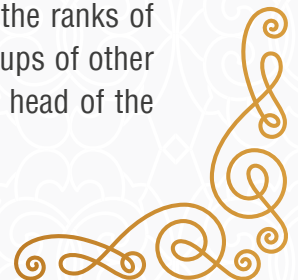
Cover of *Revista da Semana* magazine of 1907, No. 275, page 3, regarding the birth of the idea of Afonso Pena's candidacy. Collection of the Fundação Biblioteca Nacional – Brazil.

President Rodrigues Alves was planning to nominate his successor. Little did he know that this would create great discontent among the main oligarchies of the Federation, namely the states of Minas Gerais, Rio Grande do Sul, Bahia, Pernambuco and Rio de Janeiro. Amidst the lack of decision about the official candidate, there were soundings, tension, negotiations and various exchanges of missives. At times, there were fears of new revolts, at other times, attempts to find a consensus around a single slate. A true war of nerves, and all of it behind the scenes!

Rodrigues Alves had been chosen as the official candidate based on the efforts of his predecessor, Campos Salles, at a time when the candidacy of the former counselor was well underway. Although both politicians were from São Paulo and linked to the economic elites of their home state, their political natures were different. Campos Salles had been a historic republican, while Rodrigues Alves had been a counselor under the Empire. Although the ex-monarchist was not the old republican's preferred choice, Campos Salles managed to win all the laurels of the nomination and achieved the victory of the candidate he had chosen as his successor.

The first two years of Rodrigues Alves's presidential term were barely over when speculation about who his likely successor would be began. This was a common practice in the First Republic, given the uncertainties surrounding the impossibility of the president of the Republic running for re-election. It was up to whoever was holding the office to have the right to intervene in the process, nominating a person capable of succeeding him. Therefore, the former counselor from São Paulo (Alves) believed that he could ensure the acceptance, by the various oligarchical players, of a candidate by mere imposition of the Presidency, which was reflected in his choice of Bernardino de Campos, an important politician from São Paulo, in agreement with Jorge Tibiriçá, the governor of São Paulo.

The definition of the official candidacy still in 1905 would, in Rodrigues Alves' view, ensure the fulfillment of the desires of his closest allies within the ranks of the Paulista Republican Party (PRP). By contrast, for the political groups of other states, it represented the perpetuation of the São Paulo's elite at the head of the





Cover of *O Malho* magazine of 7.29.1905, No. 150, page 1, announcing Pinheiro Machado's defense of the candidacy of Campos Salles. Collection of the Fundação Biblioteca Nacional – Brazil.

federal government. This aroused feelings that ranged from acceptance, through a reluctance to question the politician anointed by the Catete (the palace that was the headquarters of the Presidency of the Republic), to indignation, which made itself felt in the launching of other possible candidates, including the then vice-president of the Republic, Afonso Pena from Minas Gerais.

However, before the succession process became dramatic and complex, it was triggered as early as 1904, by the visit that Rodrigues Alves made to Minas Gerais for an inauguration. This was regarded as implying that the Catete Palace would definitely support the candidacy of the vice-president from Minas, which was absolutely not the wish of the state of São Paulo political elite. It was not by chance that, months after the visit, Rodrigues Alves, in written correspondence with Afonso Pena in March 1905, justified his choice of the name of Bernardino de Campos and asked his vice-president to support him, in order to avoid disagreements and animosity at the republican convention that was to approve Bernardino de Campos's name.

The concern brings us to an important figure in this process: Pinheiro Machado. A senator from Rio Grande do Sul, linked to the Rio Grande do Sul Republican Party (PRR), the main party in the state, Machado had been in the Senate for 15 years and had even served as interim president. He controlled the oligarchies of small states, in addition to his home state, which gave him the right to participate in decisions regarding the presidential succession and, due to his influence, to instill some fear in those whose interests might be opposed. Perhaps for this reason, in the same letter addressed to his vice-president, Rodrigues Alves accused Pinheiro Machado of disrupting the process, as the strategic senator from Rio Grande do Sul had launched the candidacy of his friend, the politician from São Paulo Campos Salles, a former president and persona non grata to much of the São Paulo political elite due to the unpopularity of his presidential term (1898-1902).

Surprisingly, Afonso Pena's reply to Rodrigues Alves, written a few weeks later, struck the same chords as Pinheiro Machado. They did not necessarily support the same candidate, but they were both sounding an alert about what lay behind the



Cover of *O Malho* magazine of 7.29.1905, No. 150, page 1, announcing Pinheiro Machado's defense of the candidacy of Campos Salles. Collection of the Fundação Biblioteca Nacional – Brazil.

disagreement expressed by both Pena and Machado. Both positions represented a double veto: on the perpetuation of politicians from São Paulo in the Presidency of the Republic, and on the desire of the Catete Palace to control the succession process.

From then on, there was a true war behind the scenes. Afonso Pena and Pinheiro Machado actually only agreed on what they did not want, as they were proposing different candidates. While the former was seeking to promote himself, the latter sought to make the game more complicated, dividing the PRP by launching the candidacy of Campos Salles.

However, both of them were expressing the veto laid down by a substantial part of the state oligarchies, who were moving from acceptance of the choice offered by the Catete Palace to launching alternative candidates, challenging the current president.

A paradigmatic case was the then governor of the state of Minas Gerais, Francisco Sales, who warned Afonso Pena to fall in with President Rodrigues Alves against Pinheiro Machado, when the latter insistently raised the name of Campos Salles to challenge the Catete's Palace anointed candidate, because the governor of Minas believed that within the constitutional order, they could not win against the president of the Republic. In elections during the First Republic, it was more difficult for the governing *status quo* to win, unlike during the period of the Empire.

Nevertheless, this double outrage at Rodrigues Alves's attitude in trying to perpetuate the São Paulo elite at the head of the federal government, and at Alves's attempt to dominate the presidential succession process, spoke louder than any fears. Senior oligarchs in their own states participated actively with opinions and exchanges of letters, such as Bias Fortes and Feliciano Pena (Minas Gerais), Francisco Glicério (São Paulo), Lauro Muller (Santa Catarina), Leopoldo de Bulhões (Goiás) Moniz Freire (Espírito Santo), Nilo Peçanha (Rio de Janeiro), Pinheiro Machado (Rio Grande do Sul), Rosa e Silva (Pernambuco), Rui Barbosa (Bahia), among many others.

Nervousness took over due to the uncertainties surrounding the official candidacy, even though the Presidency of the Republic had already taken a position.



Image from the collection of the Biblioteca da Presidência da República.

The convention would be the stage for settling these disputes, based on the decision made by the great oligarchs, but it was necessary to arrive at the event with the name already decided. Otherwise, the fear was that, if Bernardino de Campos won by imposition of the president of the Republic, there could be revolts and even the end of the young republican regime: Bias Fortes spoke of anarchy; Pinheiro Machado, of revolution. The ghosts of the Republic's first chaotic decade were still alive in the imagination of the political elites and were reinforced by military rebellions in the federal capital in 1904.

Afonso Pena

Afonso Augusto Moreira Pena was born in Santa Bárbara do Mato Dentro, now the municipality of Santa Bárbara (Minas Gerais), on November 30th, 1847, the son of Domingos José Teixeira da Pena and Ana Moreira

Teixeira Pena. He took a degree in Law in São Paulo (1870). In 1874, he won election for the Liberal Party to the Provincial Assembly (1874-1878) and later to the Chamber of Deputies (1878-1884). Under the Empire, he was minister of War, of Agriculture, Trade and Public Works, and of the Interior and Justice. In the First Republic, he was president of Minas Gerais (1892-1894), president of the Banco da República (1895-1898), a state senator for Minas Gerais (1899-1902), and vice-president of the Republic (1902-1906). He died on June 14th, 1909, during his presidential term.

Despite these fears, the elite of Minas Gerais remained divided. Politicians from south-eastern Minas known as the *zona da mata* (a narrow band of land that continues into the eastern part of northeastern Brazil originally covered by the vegetation of the

Atlantic Forest) looked with more favor on the candidacy of Afonso Pena, while those of the central region preferred the man chosen by President Rodrigues Alves. This seemingly bleak situation contradicts the traditional view that, on the threshold of the 20th century, there was a cohesive and united Minas Gerais Republican Party (PRM). Likewise, it did not prevent Senator Bias Fortes, one of the main representatives from Minas Gerais in parliament, from realizing what strength his state had in Congress, contrasting with its fragile economic condition, due to the coffee crisis that marked the start of the century. For him, as for Afonso Pena, it was urgent that Minas Gerais should take the lead on the national scene.

Such fragility would have been enough for the faction that deferred to Catete Palace to win the dispute within the PRM, were it not for an important event: Campos Salles had officially renounced his candidacy, despite the efforts of Pinheiro



Revista da Semana magazine of 1905, No. 284, page 4. Collection of the Fundação Biblioteca Nacional – Brazil.

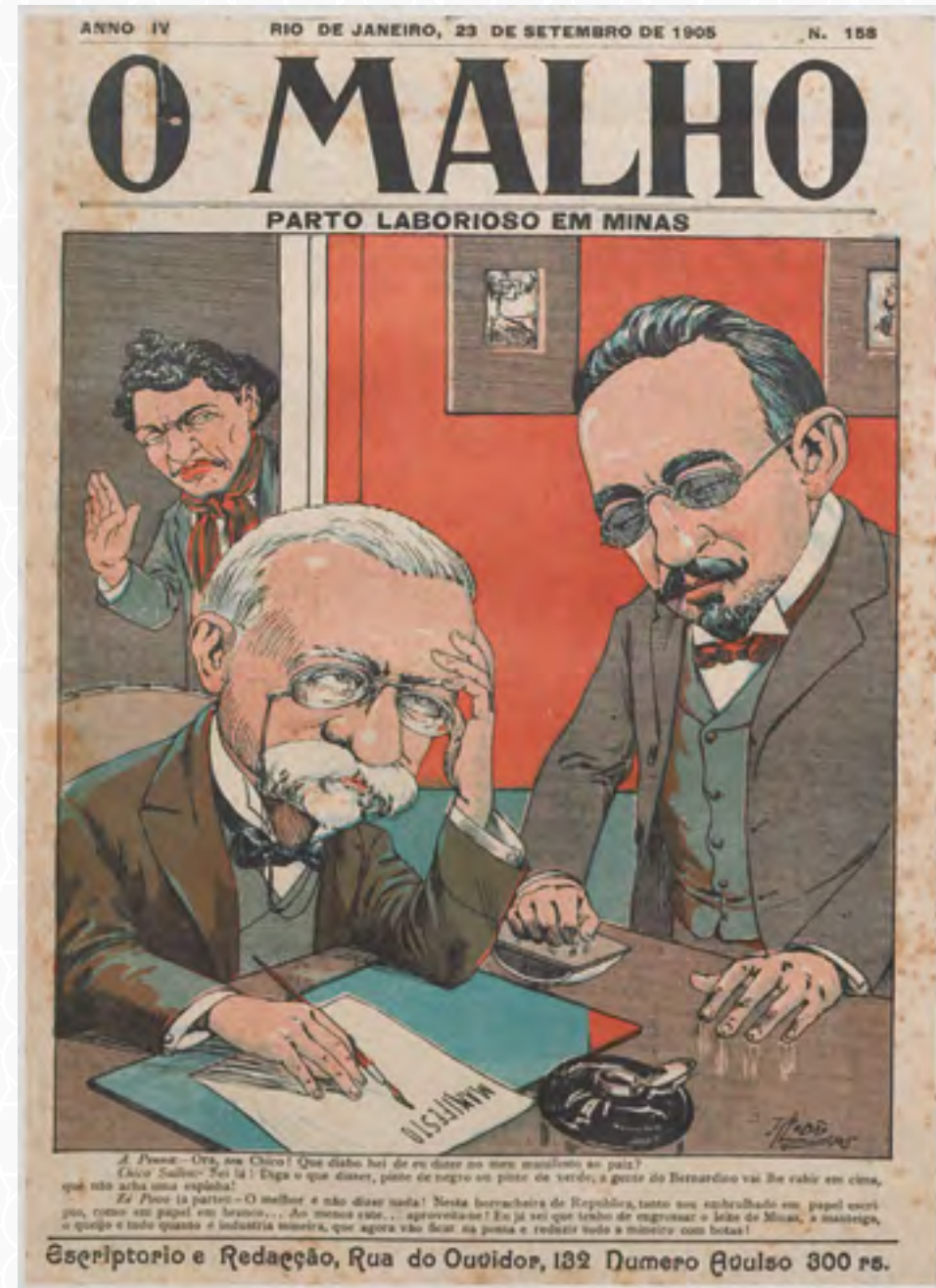


Machado to persuade him otherwise. However much the oligarch from Rio Grande do Sul disliked the idea of a *Republic of Counselors*, in other words, governed by ex-monarchists, he could find no alternative if he wanted to oppose the president's will: he approached Afonso Pena. In the end, the senator from Rio Grande do Sul tipped the balance of the divided state which, if united, could itself tip the balance of the Brazilian Federation, as stated by Bias Fortes. In Pinheiro Machado's wake came the Army, bitter about the president of the Republic's harsh repression of 1904; the oligarchy from Bahia, which had drawn back from launching the name of Rui Barbosa, mostly because of a lack of support; and Campos Salles himself, symbolically going against his fellow members of the PRP, who supported the name of Bernardino de Campos.

The delicate negotiations involving the three main representatives—Afonso Pena, Rui Barbosa and Pinheiro Machado—led to the formation of the Coalition or the Bloc, as this alliance between its three large states (Minas Gerais, Rio Grande do Sul and Bahia) became known. They were sufficiently quick to outwit the ones from São Paulo, ensuring there could be no effective response from São Paulo. To make matters worse, a series of mistakes followed, starting with the failed attempt by then-Senator Francisco Glicério to “resurrect” Campos Salles' candidacy, a move that neither attracted Pinheiro Machado, once a staunch defender, nor gained supporters within the PRP. This failure was reinforced by a frosty reception from the state of São Paulo in the bloc of the official candidate, something which occurred with the support of Glicério himself, among a few other supporters of Campos Salles in his party.

In the end, the politicians from São Paulo were isolated and could only choose between direct support, veiled support, or radical opposition to the Bloc. They chose the second option as the lesser evil.

With the alliance formed, the name of Nilo Peçanha, an oligarch from Rio de Janeiro, was approved to be the vice-presidential candidate on the ticket, incorporating the political elite of that state. Next came the official procedures of a tedious convention, which sought to show Brazilian society some cohesion, barely



O Malho magazine of 1905, No. 158, page 1. Afonso Pena, Nilo Peçanha and the dilemmas of politics. Collection of the Fundação Biblioteca Nacional – Brazil.



disguising the bitter dispute that deprived the political elite of São Paulo from the power of making its own choice.

Consequently, the elections took place smoothly in March 1906, with the names of Pena and Peçanha receiving 97.92% and 92.96% of the votes, respectively. Other names appeared on the ballots, such as that of the senator from the state of Pará, Lauro Sodré, but they had not even entered the race. The result was not challenged, nor was there a serious political rupture.

In conclusion, some features of the election of 1906 must be mentioned. The first is with regard to the weight of the economic question in the electoral

process. According to the traditional view, Rodrigues Alves' candidate would keep the state away from the coffee interests, awaiting a policy to bolster the product; while Afonso Pena would be the natural defender of the voices that were calling for such a policy. Unlike the interpretation of many scholars, the candidacy of Bernardino de Campos did not mean that the federal government was ignoring the problems in the coffee sector, as was made clear in an interview that he gave to the journalist Alcindo Guanabara, in 1905. For his part, Afonso Pena did not make any commitment on the coffee issue to win the sector's support, let alone to the São Paulo growers, who only came to support him after the withdrawal of the candidacy of Campos Salles. Therefore, the economy was not as much the central issue of the election as has always been suggested. It was not programmatic.

This takes us on to the second point: the very nature of the composition of the Bloc. It did not provide any answers suggesting that it was an alliance brought together by economic issues. As shown, the formation of this coalition of forces represented a double veto: on the São Paulo's politicians attempts to remain in charge of the Catete Palace; and the attempt by the president of the Republic himself to control the succession process, excluding the interests of the oligarchies of the various states. Thus, it is possible to state that there was a negative unity around a veto on the stance of the president.

Another interesting point has to do with the status of 1905 as a watershed year. From then on, presidential successions became more negotiated, hovering around the thin line between consensus and dissidence at the heart of the main state oligarchies. Proof of this is that the *Coalition*, which brought together the states of Minas Gerais, Bahia, Rio Grande do Sul and Rio de Janeiro, only operated for that election and did not prevent other attempts by the Catete Palace to monopolize the process. Rui Barbosa, in this regard, stated emphatically that it did not represent democratic progress, since there was merely an exchanging of one official mechanism for another.



O Malho magazine of 1905, No. 158, page. 28. Political ring around the rosy: the bloc excludes the people from São Paulo. Collection of the Fundação Biblioteca Nacional – Brazil.



This was demonstrated in the next few years, when Afonso Pena acted in the same way as Rodrigues Alves, trying to nominate the Minas Gerais federal deputy, David Campista, as his successor. Soon, the presidential successions of the First Republic would take place via transient stability agreements which, to a certain extent, did not prevent the crisis of the 1920s and the subsequent collapse of this political model in 1930.

Recommended further reading

ABRANCHES, Dunshee de. *Como se faziam presidentes: homens e fatos do início da República*. Rio de Janeiro: J. Olympio, 1973. (Documentos brasileiros, v. 160).

BORGES, Vera Lúcia Bogéa. *Morte na República: os últimos anos de Pinheiro Machado e a política oligárquica (1909-1915)*. Rio de Janeiro: IHGB: Livre Expressão, 2004.

CARONE, Edgard. *A República Velha: 2: evolução política (1889-1930)*. 4. ed. São Paulo: Difusão Europeia do Livro, 1983.

KUGLEMAS, Eduardo. *A Primeira República no período de 1891 a 1909*. In: BEIGUELMAN, Paula. Pequenos estudos de ciência política. São Paulo: Pioneira, 1973. (Biblioteca Pioneira de ciências sociais).

LACOMBE, Américo Jacobina. *Afonso Pena e sua época*. Rio de Janeiro: J. Olympio, 1986. (Coleção documentos brasileiros, v. 200).

MOTTA, Rodrigo Patto Sá. *Introdução à história dos partidos políticos brasileiros*. 2. ed. Belo Horizonte: Ed. UFMG, 1999.

PIRES, Aloildo Gomes. *Eleições presidenciais na Primeira República: uma abordagem estatística*. Salvador: Tipografia São Judas Tadeu, 1995.

RESENDE, Maria Efigênia Lage de. O processo político na Primeira República e o liberalismo oligárquico. In: FERREIRA, Jorge; DELGADO, Lucília de Almeida Neves (org.). *O tempo do liberalismo excludente: da Proclamação da República à Revolução de 1930*. Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 2006. (O Brasil republicano, v. 1).

VISCARDI, Cláudia Maria Ribeiro. *Elites políticas em Minas Gerais na Primeira República*. Estudos Históricos, Rio de Janeiro, v. 8, n. 15, p. 39-56, 1995.

VISCARDI, Cláudia Maria Ribeiro. *O teatro das oligarquias: uma revisão da “política do café com leite”*. Belo Horizonte: C/ Arte, 2001.

VISCARDI, Cláudia Maria Ribeiro. Federalismo oligárquico com sotaque mineiro. *Revista do Arquivo Público Mineiro*, Ouro Preto, v. 42, p. 95-109, 2006.

WIRTH, John. Minas e a Nação: um estudo de poder e dependência regional, 1889-1937. In: O BRASIL republicano: estrutura de poder e economia (1889-1930). 8. ed. v. 8. Rio de Janeiro: Bertrand Brasil, 2006. (Coleção História geral da civilização brasileira, t. 3).