



The campaign of the Liberal Alliance in the elections of 1930: between the forgotten March 1st and the well-remembered October 3rd

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The elections of March 1st, 1930, are still viewed in history as merely a backdrop to the event that followed: the Revolution of 1930, an event undoubtedly indelible in the national history that marked the end of the First Republic. However, recovering the uniqueness of that intense election, filled with a fierce political contest and deviating from the usual patterns attributed to the period, makes it possible to understand both the political arrangements and the elections themselves as an event in their own right, rather than as just a precursor to the so-called October 3rd Revolution.

There is no doubt that the idea of revolution was indeed present in the discourse of some of the key figures in that process. However, there must have been some exceptional, almost teleological, element capable of triggering the events that culminated in the deposition of Washington Luís.

In the short term, it is important to make clear that the events that followed the election had a major influence on the opposition's *turn around*. More specifically, there would have been no October 3rd without the March 1st elections. The poll and its nuances, however, unfolded without the actors knowing that it

would eventually lead, months after the ballot result, to an armed revolt that would take power, even though some did not rule out this possibility. October 3rd, thus, marked many interpretations of the elections of March 1st, 1930, and it would likewise become a constant memory in many other elections in Brazil's history.

Initially, it is important to note that, like the elections of 1910 and the *Republican Reaction* in 1922, the 1930 election caused excitement and agitation on the streets of Brazil's major cities, bringing a significant contingent of people to the streets and the polls. However, given the *modus operandi* of the selection of the candidates and the alliances between the state oligarchies were similar to those of previous elections, it was not this mobilization that would decide the result. Rather than the sovereign will of the people, what emerged from the polls was the agreement made prior to the election among the most powerful oligarchies, with the electoral system merely confirming the ticket that was already known in advance to be the winner. This was how the 11th direct presidential election in Brazil since Emperor Pedro II had embarked into exile on the morning of November 17th, 1889, was shaping up.





Pictures of the candidates for the Presidency and of the candidates for deputies and senators in the Federal District. *Revista da Semana* magazine of 2.22.1930, page 23. Collection of the Fundação Biblioteca Nacional – Brazil.

A crucial event for understanding that process took place in May 1928, when then-President of the Republic Washington Luís, elected by the powerful São Paulo Republican Party (PRP), referred to the politician from São Paulo, Júlio Prestes, at the inauguration of the highway connecting Rio de Janeiro to São Paulo, as the future occupant of the Catete Palace. It was not an official declaration; however, it was a frontal attack on the political aspirations of Minas Gerais, especially those of its President, Antônio Carlos Ribeiro de Andrade. The latter was seeking once again to have someone from Minas Gerais as president of the Republic, reinforcing the time-honored but not always harmonious policy of *café com leite*. The relationship between São Paulo and Minas Gerais, already strained by the economic policy of Washington Luís, took another blow with the decision to rally behind Júlio Prestes' candidacy.

Faced with this position, politicians from Minas Gerais began to seek new allies, found in the third-most important state in the federation, Rio Grande do Sul. This solution was not insignificant, since Antônio Carlos was aware of the prestige carried by the young president of Rio Grande do Sul, Getúlio Vargas, who was even being considered for the vice-presidency on Júlio Prestes's ticket.

At 47 years old, Vargas was far from having the popularity he would achieve in the following decades, but he was not a newcomer: he had been a federal deputy, Washington Luís's minister of finance, and had gone on to govern Rio Grande do Sul with the departure of Borges de Medeiros from the state executive after 25 years in power, of which the last 15 were uninterrupted. In order to complete the slate alongside Vargas, a candidate for vice-president was needed. It was necessary to show



that rather than being an isolated sally, the opposition ticket that was being formed had a national base. Thus, after attempts to bring into an alliance of politicians from the Federal District and from the states of Bahia and Pernambuco, the final choice for vice-president was João Pessoa, from the state of Paraíba, with the blessing of his uncle and former president of the Republic, Epitácio Pessoa, who had long been an ally of the politicians from Minas Gerais.

Getulio Dornelles Vargas

Getulio Dornelles Vargas was born in São Borja (Rio Grande do Sul), em 1882. A graduate of the Faculdade de Direito of Porto Alegre (1907), he earned a degree in Legal and Social Sciences. He was elected as a state deputy for the Rio Grande do Sul Republican Party (1909-1913), then a federal deputy and leader of his state's representation in the federal chamber between 1923 and 1926. He served as minister of finance under Washington Luís (1926-27) and as president of Rio Grande do Sul (1927-1930). In 1929, he ran for the Presidency of the Republic on the opposition Aliança Liberal ticket. After his defeat, he led the revolutionary movement of 1930, through which he became head of the provisional

government (1930-34) in November of that year. He led the *coup d'état* in 1937 and governed thereafter with dictatorial powers during the so-called *New State* (*Estado Novo* in Portuguese) from 1937 to 1945. After the return to democracy, he was elected senator for two states: Rio Grande do Sul (running for the Social Democratic Party [PSD]) and São Paulo (under the banner of the Brazilian Labor Party [PTB]). In the first of those positions, he was also elected to the Chamber of Deputies, but for the PTB. In São Paulo and in the Federal District, he headed the list of winning candidates of the PTB for the Chamber and received the most votes

of any candidate. In Rio de Janeiro and Minas Gerais he was placed second in the election for the Chamber. And, also for the PTB, he was elected to the same House of Congress in the states of Bahia and Paraná. He held the position of senator for the PSD. He was elected president of the Republic in 1950. He committed suicide with a shot to the heart on August 24, 1954, leaving behind a letter in which he accused the enemies of the nation of being responsible for his suicide. Source: Centro de Pesquisa e Documentação de História Contemporânea do Brasil (CPDOC/FGV).

These politicians, who presented themselves as the opposition to the federal government, were part of a new generation of the regional elites who did not participate in the founding of the Republic. In the early 1920s, they emerged with a reformist discourse that pointed to the need for industrial investments, attention to social issues, and support for the idea of greater state intervention in society. It was the gradual abandonment of the liberal discourse, noticeable not only in Brazil but also in the post-World War I world.

Alongside Vargas, politicians such as Lindolfo Collor, João Neves da Fontoura, and Osvaldo Aranha were rising in Rio Grande do Sul. They would play a central role in the events of the late 1920s and early 1930s. The political-party landscape in Minas Gerais underwent a similar process of renewal, and alongside the sexagenarian Antônio Carlos, figures such as Francisco Campos, Odilon Braga, Bias Fortes, and José Bonifácio Lafayette de Andrada emerged.

In his campaign platform for the presidency of Minas Gerais, in 1925, Antônio Carlos had already included demands that involved the deepening of Brazilian democracy, such as changes in the electoral rules and the implementation of secret voting. Meanwhile the process of renewal in the state of Paraíba had as its prominent figure João Pessoa, who, in his speeches, criticized the abuses of the colonels and violent crime, while also advocating for secret voting and state intervention to help the Northeast, which was plagued by long droughts.



Image: Collection of the Biblioteca da Presidência da República



Cover of *O Malho* magazine portraying Getulio Vargas as the devil, referring to the positivism in the state of Rio Grande do Sul and the episode of the letters he wrote aligning himself with Washington Luís. *O Malho* of 8.24.1929, page 1. Collection of the Fundação Biblioteca Nacional – Brazil.



Cover of *O Malho* magazine, portraying the Liberal Alliance as a decrepit old woman and referring once again to how bad the letters were for their electoral campaign. *O Malho* magazine of 10.5.1929, page 1. Collection of the Fundação Biblioteca Nacional – Brazil.



In the end, it was a generation that was critical of liberalism and the very oligarchical system that had given rise to it. It is well known that the three states shared a significant degree of internal renewal and a platform with visible similarities. The opposition to the government was being formed: the famous Liberal Alliance. The main feature of this coalition was, in fact, its heterogeneous nature, formed by oligarchies—some dissident, others less so—broad urban sectors, and insubordinate military groups who were against the current policy of the Republic. Despite their close ties, the various groups that supported and helped to build the Liberal Alliance were mainly united by the fight against a common enemy, to be preferably defeated at the polls, but without ruling out the possibility of doing so through force.

The agreement between the members of the oligarchies that made up the alliance was sealed at a secret meeting, held at the Hotel Glória in Rio de Janeiro, on July 17th, 1929, where the representatives of the Minas Gerais Republican Party (PRM), Francisco Campos and João Bonifácio, met with the leader of the Rio Grande do Sul Republican Party (PRR) in the Chamber of Deputies, João Neves da Fontoura. The famous Pact of Hotel Glória definitively marked the opposition of these states to the candidacy of Júlio Prestes. It took no more than a month for the tickets that would run in the elections to be defined and ready to hit the streets, with the electoral campaign even being marked by moments of extreme violence.

The Getúlio Vargas-João Pessoa slate had broad support from the urban sectors, from a significant portion of the press—especially the powerful media network of Assis Chateaubriand—and from dissident oligarchies within the states. Among these, it is worth highlighting the important participation of the São Paulo Democratic Party (PD), formed by the state's elite who had broken with the PRP. Despite all this, none of it was enough when faced with the machinery of the *status quo* slate of Júlio Prestes, from São Paulo, and his candidate for vice-president of the Republic, Vital Soares, from Bahia, who had the support of 17 states of the federation. Given the functioning of the oligarchic electoral machine, the victory of the Prestes-Soares slate seemed predictable.

Even though it was formed by elements from the oligarchies, the campaign of the Liberal Alliance showed some innovative aspects that were essential in mobilizing new social groups, primarily urban ones. The greatest example of this process was the struggle for secret voting, the creation of an Electoral Justice system, and amnesty for those who had been detained during the lieutenants' uprisings of the 1920s. The so-called *lieutenants*, junior officers who for almost a decade had shown themselves to be resentful of the abuses of power of the oligarchies and the Republic they led, were relatively close to the politicians of the Alliance. While some of these military men, such as Juarez Távora, João Alberto Lins de Barros and Siqueira Campos, approved of the idea of supporting the Liberal Alliance, others, such as Luís Carlos Prestes, then the great leader of the movement, a figure with huge political capital, were against any agreement: he wanted a revolution, not votes.



Getulio Vargas as a giant anteater: his large claws show how Getulio Vargas betrayed Washington Luís. *O Malho* magazine of 1.11.1930, page 25. Collection of the Fundação Biblioteca Nacional – Brazil.



Cartoon showing supporters of the Liberal Alliance talking about revolution. *O Malho* magazine of 2.1.1930, page 43. Collection of the Fundação Biblioteca Nacional – Brazil.



Liberalism takes Getulio Vargas away from the Catete Palace, the presidential palace. *O Malho* magazine of 3.1.1930, page 30. Collection of the Fundação Biblioteca Nacional – Brazil.



During the electoral campaign, Getulio Vargas and Luís Carlos Prestes met personally on two occasions in Rio Grande do Sul, once in September 1929 and again between January and February 1930. It was the Alliance politicians who arranged the meeting, seeking the support of the leader of the *Coluna Invicta*, thereby linking his great popularity to Vargas's candidacy. Prestes's interest in the meeting was to seek material support so he could continue his revolutionary plans. Despite the attempts, no agreement was reached. Prestes did not trust Vargas's promises of change in Brazil, considering him just another oligarch seeking power, as he had within the Liberal Alliance allies like former Presidents Wenceslau Brás, Epitácio Pessoa and Arthur Bernardes—two of whom, in fact, had ordered action against the *lieutenants* when they were the nation's top leaders. Getulio Vargas, for his part, at that time, did not believe that taking up arms would ensure victory, despite choosing this option, it is worth noting, many months later.

However, the *lieutenants* and the members of the Alliance did not part ways, since having an amnesty as one of their campaign slogans attracted part of the rebel movement and its supporters. But, despite Prestes's refusal, Alliance politicians such as Osvaldo Aranha, João Neves da Fontoura and Batista Luzardo never ruled out taking up arms to secure the recognition of an unlikely victory or, in a somewhat incipient way, to reach the Catete Palace. During the electoral campaign, Aranha orchestrated the purchase of ammunition abroad while Luzardo, at a Liberal Alliance rally in the Federal District, on September 7th, 1929, declared that victory would be achieved: *by the broad path of the law, if those in power allow us, or by the short cut of revolution, if the despots block our way!* (*Correio da Manhã* newspaper, September 8th, 1929, page 2). However, the dissident oligarchies and the *lieutenants* only formed a definitive and broad alliance starting in July 1930, about five months after the elections, when João Pessoa was assassinated.

Prestes's distancing of himself reduced the explosive character of the election campaign, but did not bring an end to the enthusiasm and the conflicts stirred up among broad sectors throughout the country. The *liberal marches* were the most innovative initiative.



Reference to the conflicts of the Liberal Marches. *O Malho* magazine of 2.15.1930, page 32. Collection of the Fundação Biblioteca Nacional – Brazil.



Images of Getúlio Vargas, in the Hotel Glória. *Caretá* magazine of 1.4.1930, page 13. Collection of the Fundação Biblioteca Nacional – Brazil.



Image of Getúlio Vargas in Rio de Janeiro at the election rally in the Castelo Esplanade. *Caretá* magazine of 1.11.1930, page 16. Collection of the Fundação Biblioteca Nacional – Brazil.

These processions passed through Minas Gerais and some states of the Northeast, holding outdoor rallies, at which Alliance politicians defended their main causes and sought to attract more people to their movement. The rallies took the candidates and their platforms out of the luxurious salons and brought them close to a portion of the Brazilian population that was not accustomed to this type of political event.

In the Federal District, the rallies became increasingly fierce, and were widely reported by the Rio newspaper *Correio da Manhã*, which became an ardent advocate of the Liberal Alliance's platform. In the Chamber of Deputies, Alliance members—such as Flores da Cunha from Rio Grande do Sul, and José Bonifácio from Minas Gerais—heated up the debates, bringing an amnesty on to the agenda. Fights in plenary sessions became more and more frequent, and the federal government ordered its deputies to abandon their benches, preventing a quorum for the sessions. The opposition's solution was to give speeches on the Chamber's staircases, which soon led to more conflicts. One of these ended with the death of a deputy from the state of



Pernambuco, Souza Filho (a supporter of Júlio Prestes), shot by a deputy from Rio Grande do Sul, Simões Lopes (the treasurer of the Liberal Alliance).

Meanwhile, in Minas Gerais, Fernando Melo Viana, the vice-president of the Republic, who had so far supported the candidacy of Getulio Vargas and João Pessoa, broke with the leadership of the PRM and launched the grouping known as the Conservative Concentration, splitting the party as he declared his support for the Júlio Prestes-Vital Soares slate. As well as causing the opposition to lose votes in the country's largest electoral college, the Conservative Concentration clashed with supporters of the Liberal Alliance in the town of Montes Claros (Minas Gerais), resulting in five deaths and several injured, the latter including Melo Viana himself. As can be seen, these conflicts reflected the tension that surrounded the 1930 election campaign. With just 14 days left until the election, the Rio Grande do Sul newspaper *Correio do Povo* reported 15 deaths and 48 serious injuries in clashes between supporters of the two candidacies. Those numbers were reached, by the way, without the necessary investigations.



Image of Getulio Vargas in Rio de Janeiro at the election rally in the Castelo Esplanade. *Careta* magazine of 1.11.1930, page 17. Collection of the Fundação Biblioteca Nacional – Brazil.

In the midst of this turmoil, where was Getulio Vargas? The president of Rio Grande do Sul seemed reluctant to engage more vigorously in his own campaign, knowing that his chances of victory were minimal, if not non-existent. After all, as Washington Luís's ex-finance minister, he understood the power that the federal government had at its disposal to crush troublesome opposition. It was necessary to ensure that the state of Rio Grande do Sul did not suffer reprisals from the federal government after a possible or almost certain, defeat. Thus, his attitude was very hesitant throughout the campaign: his correspondence shows that, while the members of the Alliance were fighting (including physically) for his victory, Vargas thought several times about giving up his candidacy and finding a peaceful solution to the situation. Some of these letters were published in the newspapers of the Federal District, which threw even more fuel on the flames of the electoral contest.

An example of Vargas's insecurity during the campaign is found in the agreement made with Washington Luís in which, to his allies' displeasure, he committed to not leaving Rio Grande do Sul to campaign. Had it not been for the direct and intense efforts of figures like Osvaldo Aranha and João Neves da Fontoura, Vargas would have effectively abandoned the Liberal Alliance for the sake of the peaceful co-existence of Rio Grande do Sul—and his own state government—with the federal government, or he might even have fulfilled his promise to the president not to leave his home state.

Vargas did not keep his word. Around 5:00 p.m. on December 30th, 1929, a Varig seaplane landed in the waters of Guanabara Bay, bringing Vargas accompanied by a small entourage. He disembarked on the island of Enxadas, where he was awaited by João Pessoa and several political figures. The Liberal Alliance candidates then made their way together to Praça Mauá, where they were welcomed by a crowd, which followed them to the Hotel Glória, where they stayed. The enthusiastic reception lasted late into the night, with speeches by the Alliance politicians José Bonifácio, João Pessoa and Epitácio Pessoa, who spoke quickly to the crowd gathered in front of the hotel. The purpose of the trip? To present the Liberal Alliance campaign in the federal capital. This event, however, did not take place at a gala dinner or ball in the salons of the Rio elite, as was usual.



According to some sources, this was due more to circumstances than to a desire to innovate: Washington Luís had instructed the main salons and theaters in Rio, including the ultra-traditional Municipal Theater, not to allow their premises to be used for the ceremony of the Liberal Alliance. Thus, a great election rally was organized by the Liberal Alliance in the Castelo Esplanade, set for January 2nd, 1930. According to the capital's press, the event was a success: a crowd of 100 thousand people gathered in the esplanade, around a small stage decked out with a red cloth and hung with Brazilian flags. Late in the afternoon, the candidates arrived and the crowd cheered the man from Rio Grande do Sul who was taking on the electoral machine of the Catete Palace. Vargas read the 31 pages of his plan for government and did not speak off the cuff. After this event, he went to São Paulo before returning to his own state. In São Paulo, there was another fervent reception: some newspapers reported a total of 120 thousand people gathered in the rain to welcome Vargas at the Estação do Norte railroad station. According to the *Diário de S. Paulo* newspaper, the event apparently surpassed the acclamation received by Rui Barbosa during the Civil Campaign. Meanwhile, the vice-presidential candidate, João Pessoa, returned to Rio de Janeiro, where he tried to organize some of the Alliance's marches, continuing in the middle of January to the city of Belo Horizonte, the capital of Minas Gerais.



Carioca newspaper on election day 3.1.1930. Collection of the Fundação Biblioteca Nacional – Brazil.

All this mobilization by the Liberal Alliance was not enough to prevent the victory of the government slate. Held as usual on March 1st, the election coincided with the start of Carnival. Thus, on a hot summer's day, a celebratory Saturday, 5.7% of the Brazilian population went to the polling stations to choose the president of the Republic. Despite these figures, the election of March 1st, 1930, was the biggest of the First Republic in terms of the number of voters. The Júlio Prestes-Vital Soares ticket won 1,091,709 votes; while Getúlio Vargas and João Pessoa ended up with 742,794. The results from the states that showed flagrant examples of fraud and arbitrary actions typical of the First Republic were obvious: while Júlio Prestes achieved 320 thousand votes against 30 thousand given to Getúlio Vargas in São Paulo, in Rio Grande do Sul the man from São Paulo won only 1 thousand against 295 thousand for the home candidate. However, it is worth noting how the urban population had become an important factor in this election because, in the Federal District, which was at the time the city of Rio de Janeiro, the contest was quite close, with Vargas losing by a difference of 2 thousand votes (30 thousand against 32 thousand).

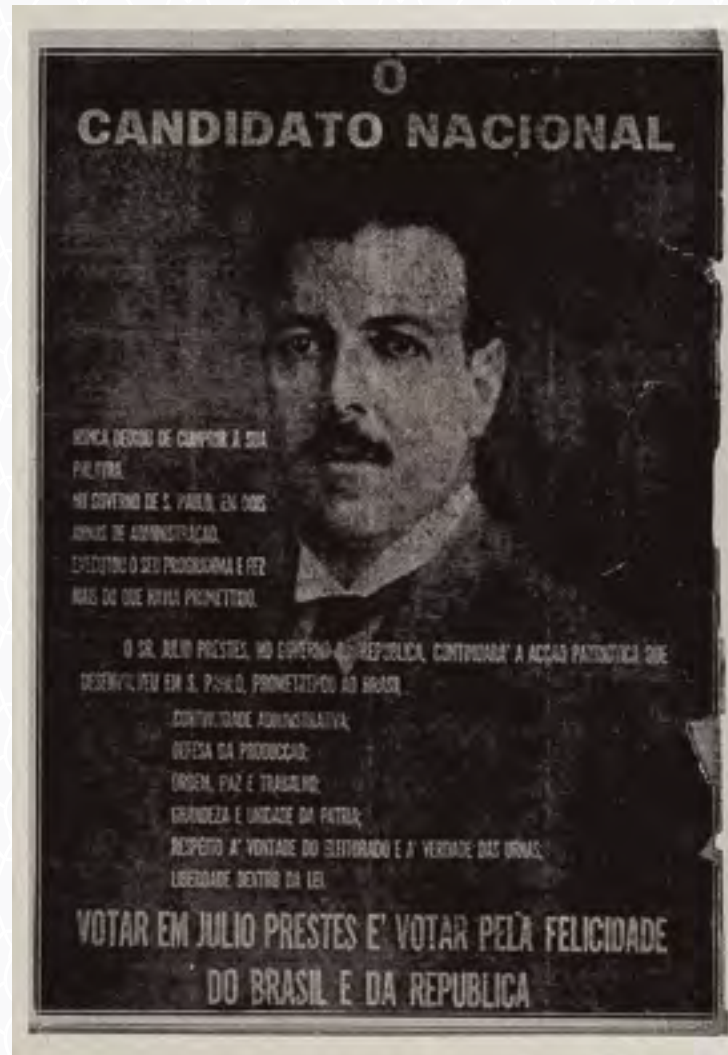
Once the elections were over, the opposition states suffered tough federal interventions, actions that contrasted with those of previous elections, when attempts were made to integrate the opposition forces and not exclude them. Associated with the assassination of João Pessoa—a crime of passion, but which served as



a mobilizing factor—and with the creaking political system, the interventions provided the perfect storm.

Washington Luís was deposed 22 days before handing over the presidential sash to Júlio Prestes. This movement—a *coup*, in fact—would become known as the *Revolution of 1930*, and the date on which it began, October 3rd, 1930, would become the landmark of Getúlio Vargas’ coming to power. In the 15 years which followed, only 3 were under a democratic regime (1934-1937); the other 12 were under dictatorships (1930-1934; 1937-1945). Throughout this period, Brazil’s first experience as a republic was given a new name: the Old Republic—and it was to be forgotten, along with the elections that had taken place up until that point. This deliberate forgetting took with it the elections of March 1st. There remained only October 3rd.

With the end of the period of the *Estado Novo*, Brazil entered a democratic period that had never been experienced before, with large national parties, closely-fought election campaigns, candidates with broad social bases, challenges to election results, politicians who claimed to be the saviors of the nation, parties that swore they represented the true will of the people, *coups*, counter-coups, dictatorship. To some extent, although the interpretation varied according to the observer’s point of view, October 3rd and its consequences would always be there. And this was not by pure chance. The electoral reorganization that took place with the 1946 Constitution established that the new president of the Republic should be elected 120 days before the



Election poster for Julio Prestes. *Correio da Manhã* newspaper of 03.01.1930, page 2. Collection of the Fundação Biblioteca Nacional – Brazil.

end of the current presidential term, which would finish on January 31st of the fifth year since that current president was sworn in. According to this rule, the precise date of the election would be October 3rd. Coincidences (coincidences?) of Brazilian electoral life.

Recommended further reading

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