



The pen against the sword: intellectualism and militarism at odds in the *civilist* campaign of 1910

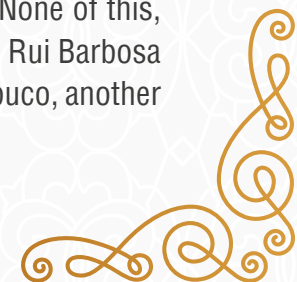
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The president of the Republic, Afonso Pena's interest in making his successor was clear. After the failure of the negotiations around the name of David Campista, the then minister of Finance, who did not even win the seal of approval of his home state (Minas Gerais), the Catete Palace (in other words, the federal government) considered nominating a politician with greater national prominence, such as ex-presidents Campos Salles or Rodrigues Alves. Even the Baron of Rio Branco, who had also been a member of the Chamber of Deputies, was considered. In the end, however, Marshal Hermes da Fonseca, the minister of War, secured the nomination, sponsored by Pinheiro Machado, the leader of the Rio Grande do Sul Republican Party and recognized as one of the most influential and nationally prominent figures of the time. The elites in the states of Minas Gerais and Rio Grande do Sul came over to the military man's side, especially after the death of Afonso Pena, an event which placed the then vice-president, Nilo Peçanha in charge of the country. Even though he declared himself neutral in the presidential transition process, Nilo Peçanha was known to be sympathetic to Hermes da Fonseca. Minas Gerais also imposed its own candidate for vice-president of the Republic: Wenceslau Brás, the state governor.

At that time, senator Rui Barbosa's popularity was high. This was helped by his recent participation in the Second Hague Conference (in 1907) and his appointment as president of the Academia Brasileira de Letras (ABL), the Brazilian Academy of Language and Literature, (in 1908). These actions contributed to the strengthening of Rui Barbosa's image in the country, based on his unquestionable intellectual capacity, expressed in the characteristic rhetoric of the speeches he made. His position as deputy speaker of the Federal Senate gave him extensive press coverage when the work of Congress was reported by Brazil's main newspapers. Now at the peak of his political career, Rui Barbosa hoped that his candidacy would be supported by the important allies he had cultivated over the years, such as Pinheiro Machado and Afonso Pena himself, who had been his classmate at university. As he had withdrawn from the presidential race in 1905 in favor of Pena, Barbosa was counting on the exchange of favors at that time. None of this, however, was enough to win him the official nomination. The fact that Rui Barbosa was overlooked is attributed to Rosa e Silva, from the state of Pernambuco, another national leader who made no effort to hide his personal dislikes.





Cover of *O Malho* magazine of 4.3.1909, No. 342, satirizing the unpopular candidacy of David Campista. Collection of the Fundação Biblioteca Nacional – Brazil

A few days after the launch of Hermes da Fonseca's candidacy, Rui Barbosa went on the attack, publishing a document that became known as the Bronze Letter. In it, he pointed out the marshal's political unpreparedness for the position. He went further, condemning the possibility of a return to power by the military, arguing strongly that the Presidency of the Republic should remain in civilian hands. This was a position that chimed with that of the era's dissident forces, in other words, the dominant factions in the states of São Paulo and Bahia, as well as the opposition in the various states. Faced with the difficulty of finding a challenger for Hermes, they invested in Rui's challenging profile. It should be stressed: this was for lack of an alternative. The respective refusals of Rodrigues Alves, the Baron of Rio Branco and Rosa e Silva—all invited to run but unwilling to compete against Hermes—showed the politicians from São Paulo that the only remaining option was to endorse Barbosa's candidacy as a protest vote. In these circumstances, Albuquerque Lins, the governor of São Paulo, agreed to join the slate as candidate for vice-president. Thus began the first truly competitive presidential race in the republican era, one that would be characterized by the clash between the proponents of so-called *militarism* and, on the other side, the *civilists*.

Hermes da Fonseca

Hermes Rodrigues da Fonseca was born in São Gabriel (Rio Grande do Sul) on May 12th, 1855. He took a bachelor's degree in Science and Literature in 1871, before joining the Army in the same year. He held several positions, eventually being promoted to marshal in 1906. He was appointed minister of War under the mandate of Afonso Pena as president of the Republic and a judge of the Military Supreme Court. After holding office as president of the Republic (1910-1914), he was elected senator in 1914, but gave up his



Image: collection of the Biblioteca da Presidência da República.



Photos published in *Careta* magazine of 2.26.1910, page 19, showing the people following Rui Barbosa in Ouro Preto.
Collection of the Fundação Biblioteca Nacional – Brazil.

seat after the death of Pinheiro Machado. In that year, he traveled to Europe, living in the Swiss Confederation until 1920. He died on September 9th, 1923.

Despite his advanced age, the sixty-year-old Rui Barbosa did not restrict his electioneering activities to the traditional banquets that served as the stage for political negotiations in the Federal District (at the time, the city of Rio de Janeiro), heading out to campaign across the interior of the states of Minas Gerais, São Paulo and his home state, Bahia. During this marathon, the *civilist* candidate did not restrict himself to dealing only with the most privileged circles, but sought to make speeches to the whole population. Sometimes, shops closed and streets were decked out with decorations to mark his appearance. The newspapers and magazines of the time covered what the candidate Rui Barbosa himself described as his *electoral excursion*, which became the eponymous title of his book.

The *civilist* candidate's platform for government was based on a political confrontation with two evils of the time: federal intervention in the states, and the state oligarchies that were entrenched in power.



Detail of the front-page headline of the newspaper *Correio Paulistano* of 12.16.1909, reporting the warm reception given to the journey made by the civilian candidate. Collection of the Fundação Biblioteca Nacional – Brazil.

Rui Barbosa proposed a constitutional revision as a remedy for federal intervention, which was envisaged in Article 6 of the Federal Constitution of 1891 and which had become a common source of abuses of presidential power against the autonomy of the states. The candidate sought to establish more restrictive

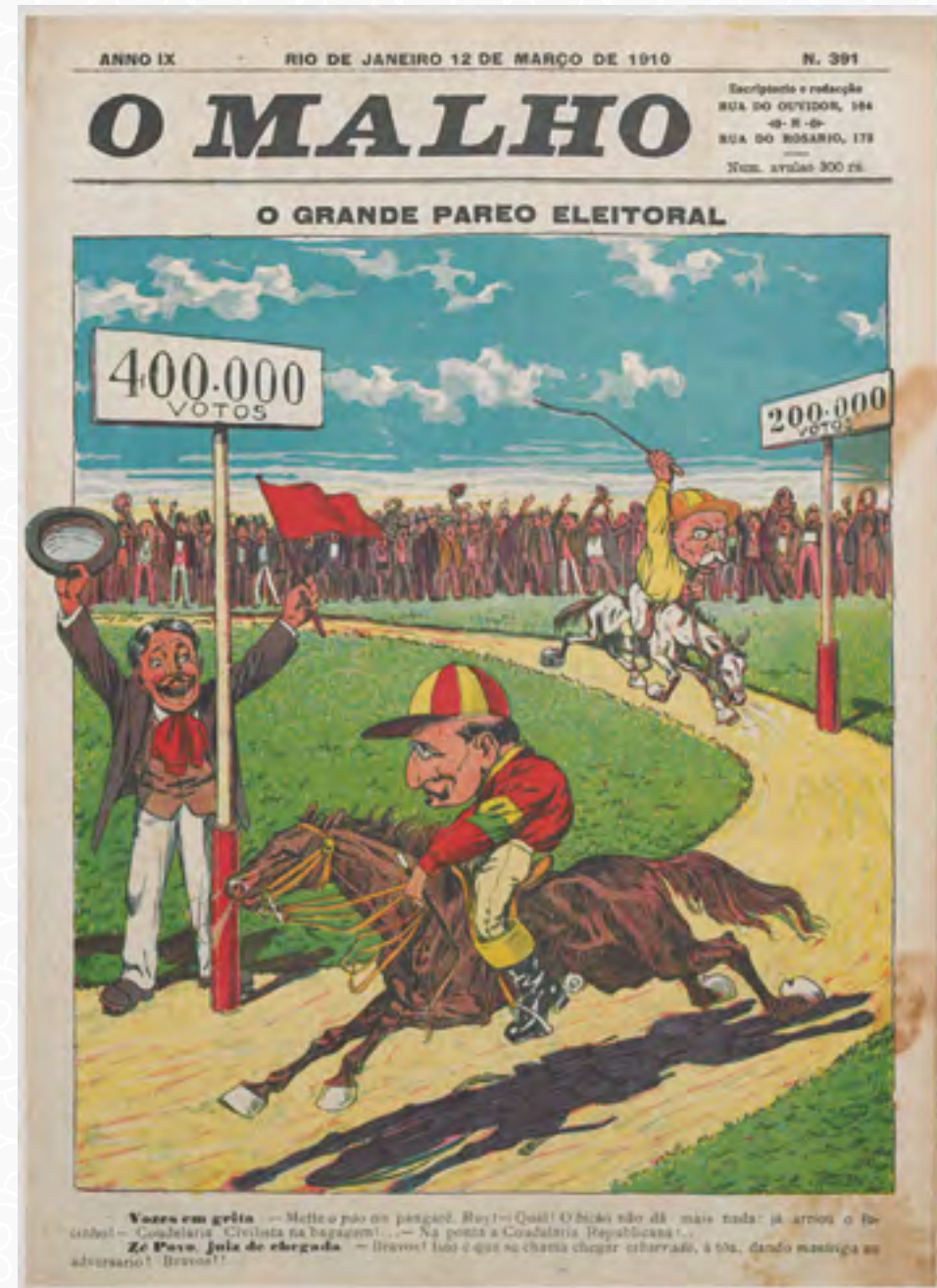


parameters for the possibility of federal intervention, but he also took advantage of his revisionist discourse to embrace changes in a series of other related topics, from the appointment of magistrates to the budgetary process.

As for combating the oligarchies in the states, the presidential candidate Rui Barbosa argued for wide-ranging electoral reform that would increase the chances of opposition forces being elected. In setting out this platform, Barbosa did not miss the opportunity to launch direct attacks on the federal government, the Army and all his political rivals.

Marshal Hermes da Fonseca, however, avoided being drawn into these disputes, confident that the support he enjoyed among the elites of most of the states would guarantee him victory without too much effort.

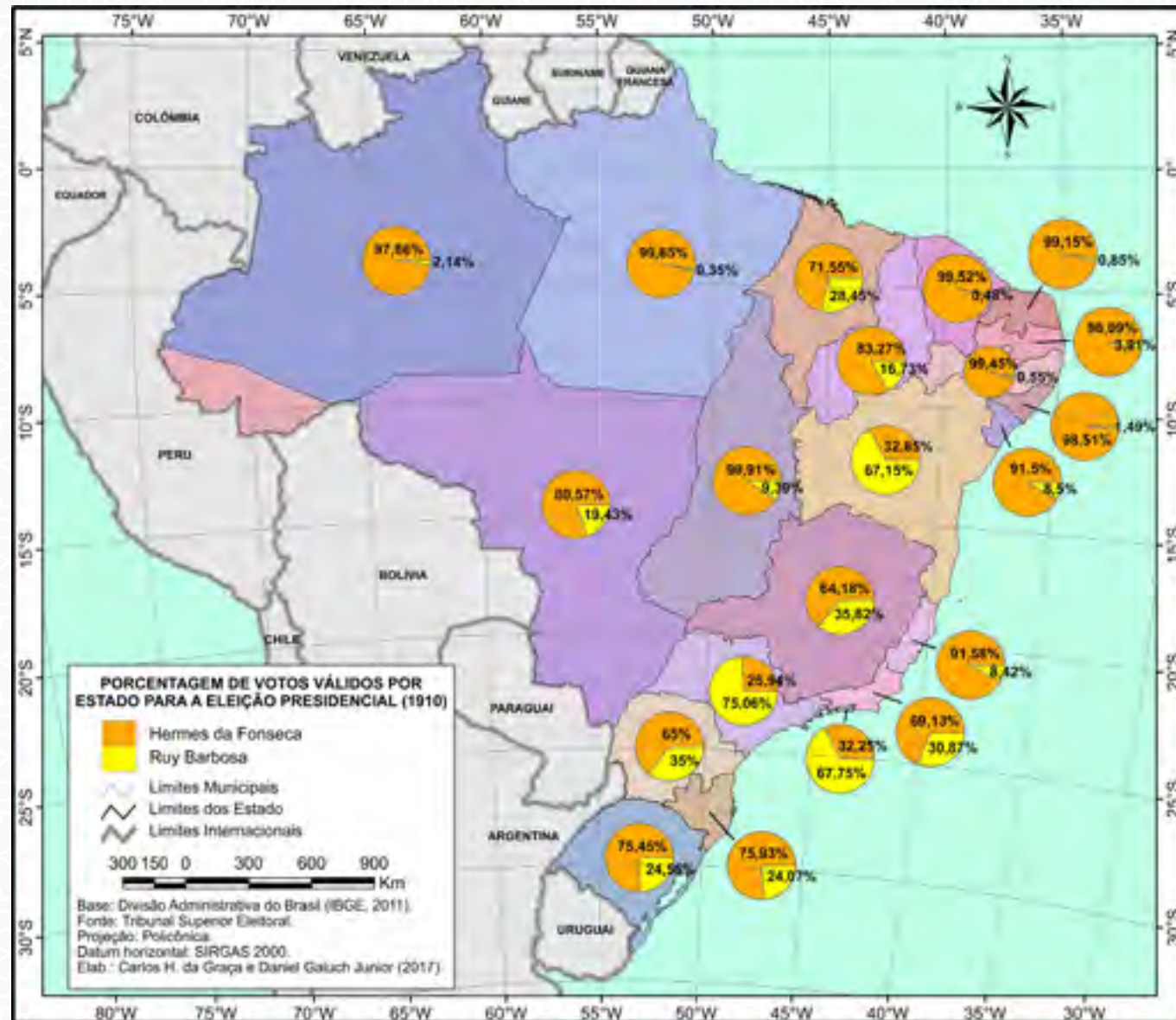
And this was, in fact, what happened. A few days after the election of March 1st, 1910, the press reported Hermes's victory, by about 400 thousand votes against 200 thousand for Rui Barbosa: the smallest vote difference known since the Republic's first presidential elections. In order to have an idea of how closely fought the 1910 election was, just remember that the marshal got 57.9% of the votes, 40% less than the vote achieved by his predecessor in 1906 (when Afonso Pena took 97.9% of the votes).



Cover of *O Malho* magazine of 3.12.1910, No. 391, alluding to the *great electoral contest*.
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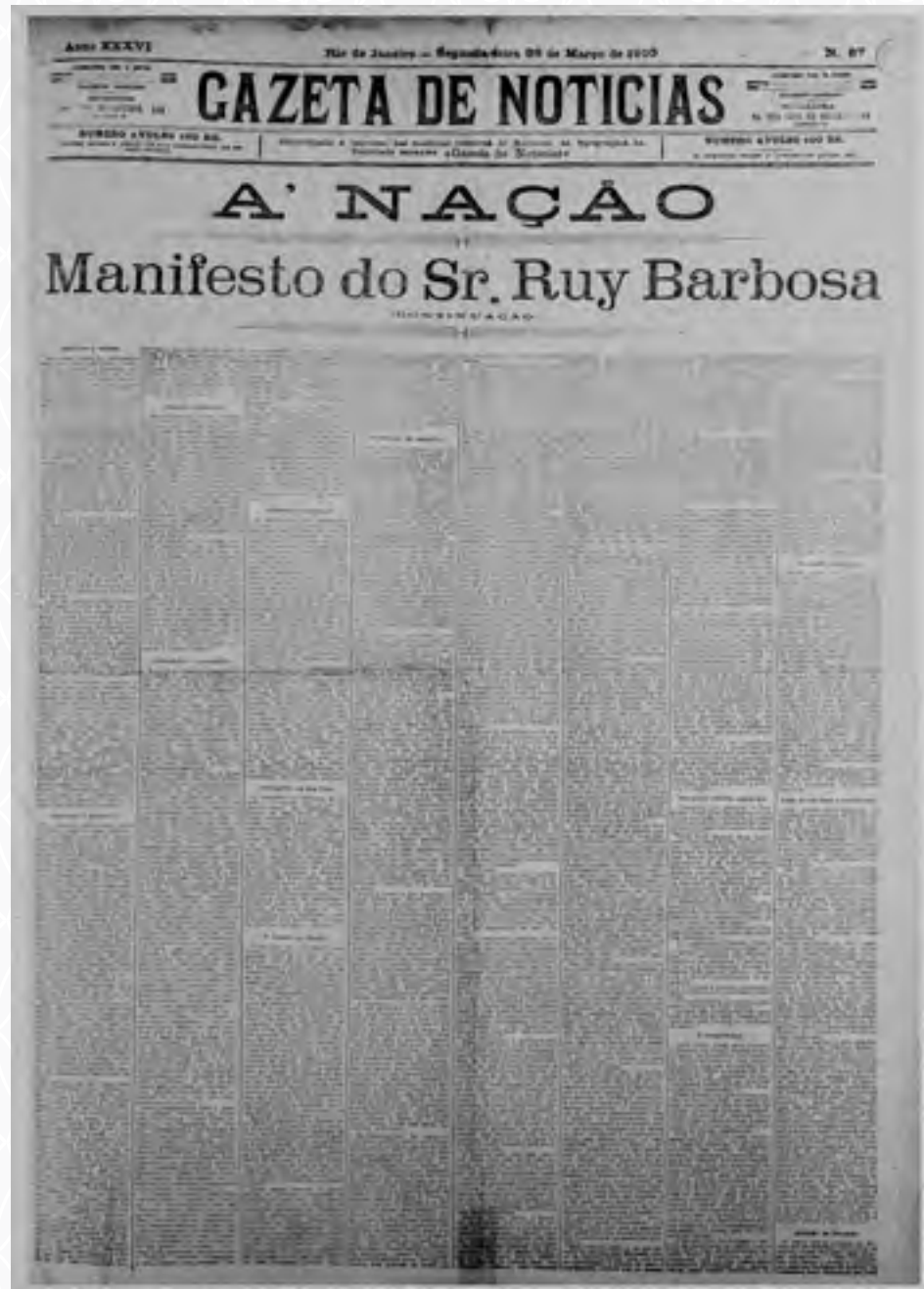
The following maps illustrate the margins of victory and defeat, state by state, showing that Rui Barbosa won only in Bahia and in São Paulo.



Credits: Carlos H. da Graça and Daniel Galuch Jr.



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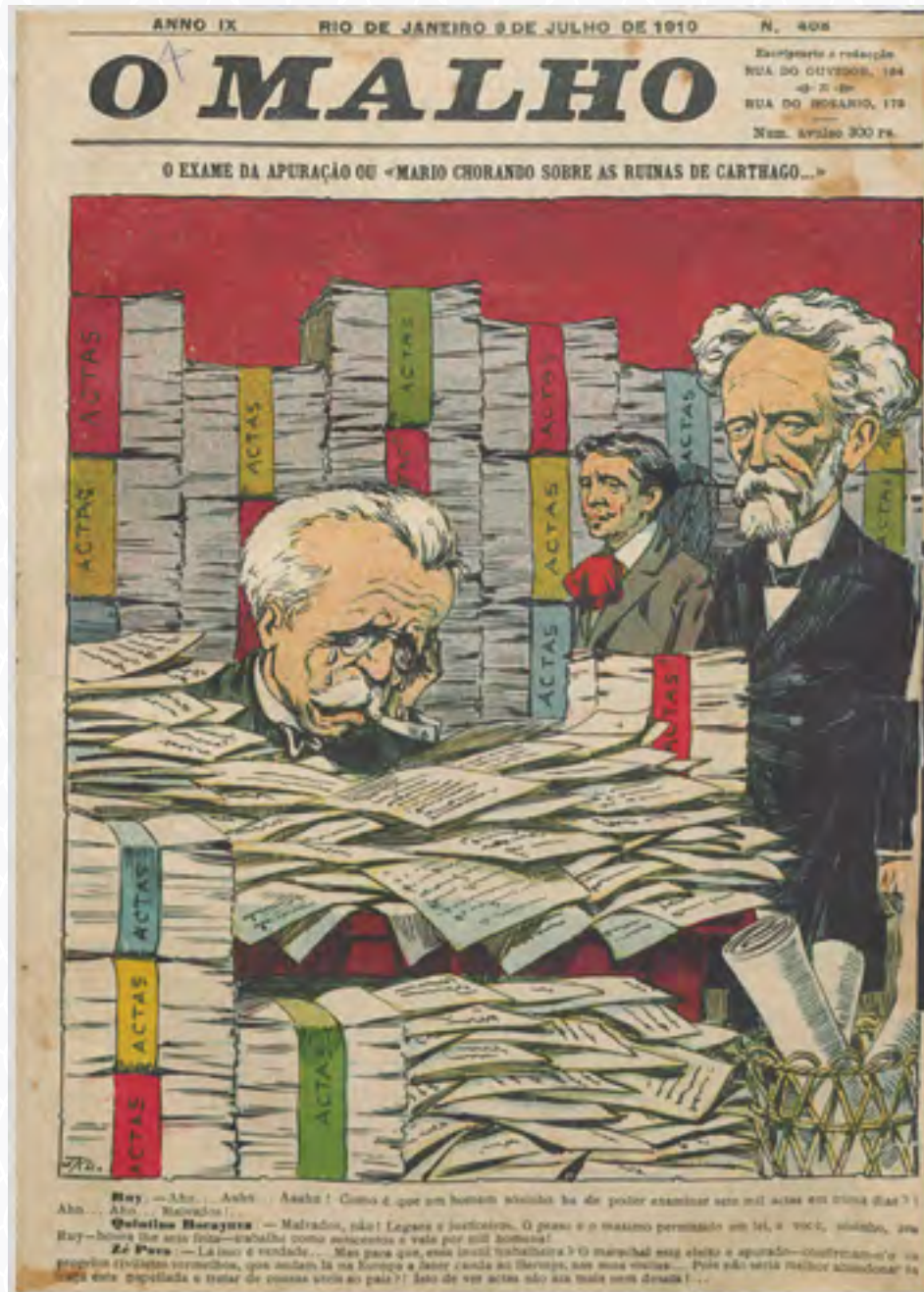


The *Gazeta de Notícias* newspaper of 3.28.1910 highlighting the content of Rui Barbosa's manifesto for the nation. Collection of the Fundação Biblioteca Nacional – Brazil.

Unhappy with the result, the candidate Rui Barbosa tried to react. First of all, he drafted a manifesto to the nation, especially accusing President Nilo Peçanha of turning a blind eye to the *military repression exerted by his forces over the state of Rio, the state of Minas and the state of Bahia* (Barbosa, 1910, page 299). All of them were at the time under decrees of states of emergency: a measure envisaged by the Federal Constitution that suspended any legal guarantees in the territory with the aim of allowing the government to deal with exceptional situations and, therefore, regarded by many politicians and intellectuals as a way of legitimizing arbitrary acts and abuses by the central authority. This was an interpretation backed by the civilist candidate, who sought to associate his defeat at the ballot box with the restrictions on free voting in place in those areas: in his view, an example of an extra-legal favor given by the federal government to Hermes da Fonseca.

Next, Rui Barbosa laid down the first formal challenge to the electoral results of a presidential race in the history of the Republic. This mechanism was envisaged in the law, but had never been used until then. The *civilist* candidate spent days on end studying the ballot papers from the election, trying to prove that he deserved to win. According to his calculations, Marshal Hermes da Fonseca had won in the majority of states, but had secured only 126,392 votes.

In contrast, Rui Barbosa argued that he had won in Bahia, in São Paulo, in Minas Gerais, in Rio de Janeiro and in the federal capital, with a total of exactly 200,359 votes. He would not be able, however, to reverse the situation. His dream of governing Brazil was coming to an end.



Issue of *O Malho* magazine of 7.9.1910 satirizes Rui's efforts to have the votes recounted.
Collection of the Fundação Biblioteca Nacional – Brazil.

Recommended further reading

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BORGES, Vera Lúcia Bogéa. *A Batalha eleitoral de 1910: imprensa e cultura política na Primeira República*. Rio de Janeiro: Apicuri, 2011.

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GARCIA UEÓCKA, Lorayne. A força das imagens na campanha civilista: representações em fotografias e caricaturas. *Colloquium Humanarum*. ISSN: 1809-8207, v. 1, n. 1, p. 63-72, 22 fev. 2005.

GONÇALVES, João Felipe. *Rui Barbosa: pondo as idéias no lugar*. Rio de Janeiro: FGV, 2000.

SARMENTO, Silvia Noronha. *A raposa e a águia: J. J. Seabra e Rui Barbosa na política baiana*. Salvador: EDUFBA, 2011.



Photograph published in *Careta* magazine of 2.26.1910, page 19, showing the people following Rui in the city of Ouro Preto.
Collection of the Fundação Biblioteca Nacional – Brazil.