

# DOCUMENTO

## “Brazil and Vargas”:

### Reflexões sobre o Relatório de Rockwell Kent após sua viagem ao Rio de Janeiro em 1937

(in english, p. 163)

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**RESUMO** Este artigo cumpre o papel de traduzir o relatório “Brazil and Vargas”, escrito por Rockwell Kent em 1938, após sua viagem como observador político ao Rio de Janeiro, em uma missão que durou nove dias durante o mês de novembro de 1937. Também aqui se busca refletir sobre o que estava acontecendo no Brasil ditatorial de Getúlio Vargas e sobre o modo como Kent elabora seu relatório, ou seja, como este desenvolve seu pensamento em relação ao contexto político do momento. Para fins de contextualização mais precisa, o artigo ainda lança um olhar sobre a amizade de Rockwell Kent e Cândido Portinari, no que diz respeito às relações que permeiam a trajetória artística de Portinari.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE** Rockwell Kent, ditadura da década de 1930, Getúlio Vargas, História do Brasil.

**ABSTRACT** This article aims at translating the “Brazil and Vargas” report, written by Rockwell Kent in 1938 after his nine-day trip as political observer to Rio de Janeiro in November, 1937. It also aims at reflecting upon what was going on in Brazil during the dictatorship of Getúlio Vargas, as well as upon how Kent creates his report, that is, how the latter develops his thoughts in relation to that moment’s political context. For a more precise contextualization, this article also discusses Rockwell Kent and Cândido Portinari’s friendship, regarding the relationships underlying Portinari’s artistic path.

**KEYWORDS** Rockwell Kent, Dictatorship in the 30’s, Getúlio Vargas, History of Brazil.

### Considerações acerca do relatório “Brazil and Vargas”<sup>1</sup>

Embora muito pouco conhecido no Brasil, Rockwell Kent<sup>2</sup> foi mais do que um pintor, desenhista e arquiteto, pois não parecia haver limites dentro de si para tudo o que desejava fazer em vida. Ou seja, Kent se destacou como ilustrador de livros, revistas e propagandas, como gravador, escritor, viajante e como ativista político de esquerda, chegando mesmo a se filiar ao Partido Comunista nos Estados Unidos. Desta mente profundamente inquieta e criativa pode-se verificar o quanto contribuiu com as questões de seu tempo, questões estas que envolviam a arte, a cultura e a política.

De suas inúmeras viagens pelo mundo, Kent trouxe mais do que imagens registradas em desenhos, pinturas, ilustrações e gravuras, trouxe uma rica diversidade de cultura. Por exemplo, de sua viagem ao Brasil em 1937, como recém-eleito vice-presidente do Comitê Nacional pelos Direitos do Povo e como representante da Junta do Comitê pela Defesa do Povo Brasileiro, Rockwell Kent e seu colega Jerome Davis, também ativista, vieram como observadores políticos ao Rio de Janeiro. Nessa cidade passaram nove dias, coletando informações sobre a Ditadura de Getúlio Vargas, a qual começou com um golpe de estado no mesmo ano, além de terem buscado informações sobre o paradeiro de Prestes, líder revolucionário que se insurgiu contra Vargas e acabou encarcerado como preso político.

Assim, em meio à turbulência que ocorria no Rio naquele momento, Kent e Davis foram enviados ao Rio, no dia 25 de novembro, após planos iniciados em junho do mesmo ano durante uma conferência com o embaixador brasileiro Oswaldo Aranha, próximo do Golpe de Estado que Vargas aplicaria. Em seu relato ricamente descrito, Kent nos dá as razões pelas quais ele e seu companheiro Davis foram enviados ao Brasil. Pois, cinco meses antes da partida, como o próprio artigo escrito por ele menciona, Vargas havia substituído seu “estado de guerra” pelo de “emergência”. Desse modo, trouxe um sentido mais liberal, que não chamasse tanto a atenção para a barbárie de suas prisões arbitrárias e inconstitucionais, como a de Prestes e tantos outros. Além disso, Vargas estava próximo de decretar seu golpe, o qual poria fim à democracia.

Kent inicia seu artigo narrando suas aventuras ocorridas com a polícia secreta de Vargas no dia de chegada ao Brasil, durante a madrugada e sobre o medo de ser extraditado após ter sua pasta tomada pelos agentes secretos, uma vez que ela continha uma lista com nomes de prisioneiros políticos, incluindo o do próprio Prestes. Na verdade, o que Kent queria com toda sua sagacidade e sorrisos era descobrir o paradeiro de Prestes e libertá-lo, pois esse era também o desejo do embaixador Aranha. Mas, mais do que isso. Naquela Pré-Segunda Guerra Mundial, o que se desejava em meio àquele clima tenso e prestes a explodir como uma caldeira fervente era fazer com que o Brasil, um país de gente tão simpática, calma, honesta e trabalhadora se libertasse do jugo daquele ditador afiliado aos regimes totalitários e fascistas europeus, como o da Itália de Mussolini ou da Espanha do terrível Franco. Enfim, o que se queria era paz, liberdade, trabalho e terra para os trabalhadores.

Com o intuito de se firmar no poder, Vargas coloca José Américo de Almeida, escritor nortista acostumado a conviver com a miséria de seu povo e que resolve dar terra às massas, para o desespero da elite cafeicultora. Nesse ambiente de insatisfação da elite e de extrema satisfação do povo, o qual teria finalmente seu pedaço de terra, Vargas ganha o tão almejado apoio das massas e encontra álibi para seu golpe. Além disso, o esperto Vargas ainda conquista a Igreja, devolvendo a ela a autonomia em relação ao ensino, desde que contribuísse para aniquilar qualquer foco de comunismo entre os alunos, tanto nas escolas quanto nas universidades. Portanto, com o povo iludido com a promessa de terras, e a Igreja a seu favor, Vargas encontrou total liberdade para impor sua ditadura.

Em meio a esse clima ditatorial de Vargas, Kent demonstra o quanto as pessoas não se importam realmente com as prisões e com as torturas, pois se elas se importassem realmente com isso, não haveria terreno fértil para as maldades praticadas por Vargas, que Kent diz que seria incapaz de matar, porque no fundo era uma pessoa boa. Segundo Kent o tipo de discurso de Vargas se assemelha à visão que se tinha de Lourenço, o Magnífico, que diante do filho doente, o renega em prol do Estado, defendendo, assim, a vida pública em detrimento da vida privada. Ou nos próprios dizeres de Kent: “O Estado sou eu”<sup>3</sup> – frase célebre que no

passado foi dita por Luís XIV e a qual, no contexto de Kent e de Vargas, demonstraria a visão totalitária do presidente. Kent considera Vargas, após atacá-lo tanto em seu relatório, como alguém que tinha bom coração apesar de tudo.

Um outro ponto que merece destaque nesse relatório é o tipo de escrita que Kent emprega ao relatar o desfile atrasado de comemoração do Dia da Bandeira, quando descreve com olhos de artista as cores das roupas, verdes e brancas, além das roupas napoleônicas. Com isso, pode-se ver que Kent compara Vargas a Napoleão, não só pela roupa dos soldados, mas pelo modo de governar, que passa por cima de tudo e de todos para alcançar glória e reconhecimento. Mas que glória há em quem aprisiona para torturar? Até mesmo a Constituição de 1937 se define contra essa prática horrível.

Existe no discurso de Rockwell Kent algo de estranho, talvez oriundo do próprio clima de censura e repressão que rondava os pensamentos, as palavras e expressões na época, uma espécie de medo de que as relações entre o Brasil e os Estados Unidos fossem abaladas diplomaticamente. Ou seja, no início do relatório, Kent narra como sua viagem ao Rio havia começado, sua quase extradição após o entrevisto com a polícia secreta de Vargas, a denúncia da prisão arbitrária de Prestes, as ligações de Vargas com o fascismo. Entretanto, mais adiante em seu artigo passa a defender a boa índole de Vargas, quando na realidade o que ocorre no Brasil é justamente o oposto.

Na busca por dados sobre Rockwell Kent, deparei-me com esboços para esse relatório, os quais trazem inúmeras versões com palavras trocadas, parágrafos cancelados. Aí, permito-me uma pergunta: Por que ele fez isso? Ao escrever um artigo, o autor sempre modifica palavras para obter um texto melhor, há sempre uma escolha por palavras e frases mais adequadas ao pensamento que almeja desenvolver. Mas por que anular parágrafos inteiros? O que estaria por trás disso? Seria por razões de simples mudança de opinião? Ou teria Kent sido convencido a mudar de opinião por alguém cujos interesses estivessem sendo afetados naquele momento? Não se sabe.

O que se pode afirmar é que havia uma forte censura e que os Estados Unidos não queriam iniciar um incidente diplomático com o Brasil, uma vez que

o Brasil ocupa a maior parte do território americano e tinha fortes relações com a Europa, relações essas até de cunho pessoal, de amizade com países como a Itália, por exemplo. Portanto, romper com a democracia não era o intuito nem de Kent nem dos Estados Unidos. O próprio Rockwell, embora fosse comunista, era democrata e acreditava na democracia, no direito ao trabalho, ao bem-estar dentro da sociedade, e na liberdade para o povo.

Por exemplo, no final de um rascunho<sup>4</sup> para o relatório apresentado por Kent em 1938, cuja versão final está aqui presente, existe um curioso desfecho no qual Kent propõe que Vargas seja deposto, com a seguinte frase: “Good, let’s throw him out!” Há ainda um outro trecho que desperta atenção quando Kent está sendo interrogado pelo tenente, e este lhe pergunta sobre Davis, confundindo-o com James Levinson, comunista também procurado pelo regime de Vargas. Na versão final do relatório, isto não é mencionado. Mas por quê? Qual a razão disso? Pode-se perceber que, em seus rascunhos, Kent é muito mais contundente do que na versão final, o que contribui para um amolecimento de seu discurso, muito embora esse traga elementos de clara acusação contra Vargas, tanto quanto na versão final, aqui apresentada. Talvez o fato de o embaixador Aranha ter-lhe recomendado que tomasse cuidado com o que iria escrever para não abalar as relações com o Brasil seja a razão de tudo isso. Dessa forma, a análise comparativa entre os esboços e o relatório final aqui apresentado permite afirmar que o pensamento de Rockwell Kent passa por certa mudança ao atenuar o conteúdo do relatório e omitir alguns trechos mais incisivos, visando evitar o confronto direto com a política de Vargas, o que poderia abalar as relações entre o Brasil e os Estados Unidos naquele momento.

### Rockwell Kent e Cândido Portinari

Foi também em 1937 que Rockwell Kent e Cândido Portinari<sup>5</sup> se conheceram. E desta importante amizade que surgiu entre ambos iniciou-se uma fundamental relação que permeou a obra artística tanto de Kent, como de Portinari. Ou seja, a partir desta cooperação, Portinari conseguiu, graças ao apoio de Kent, projetar-se no mercado internacional, sobretudo dos Estados Unidos, através da exposição de suas obras

na Feira Mundial de Nova York, em 1939, para a qual executa três painéis, além da exposição no Riverside Museum, também na mesma cidade, no ano seguinte, e em várias outras cidades americanas. Além de expor a obra de Portinari, conseguiu um importante avanço para sua carreira, através do catálogo introduzido por Kent, chamado *Portinari: His Life and Art*<sup>6</sup> escrito em 1940. Nesse catálogo, Rockwell Kent apresenta Portinari ao público americano, descrevendo sua obra e seu caráter. Há também, no mesmo catálogo, uma introdução feita por Josias Leão, o qual relata a trajetória de Portinari, de sua infância até o auge do sucesso.

Aliás, logo no início dessa importante amizade, Portinari pintou um retrato de Rockwell Kent, que hoje pertence ao acervo do Museu de Arte Brasileira da Fundação Armando Álvares Penteado, MAB-FAAP. [Fig. 1]

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### BRAZIL AND VARGAS by Rockwell Kent<sup>7</sup>

(em português, p. 165)

*“Here lay the greatest undeveloped possibilities for productive wealth to be found on this globe. And here were the greatest contrasts. On the coast live the sophisticated upper-class city dwellers, who spend half their time in Europe, speak five or six languages and live in imperial splendour, bothering as little about the aboriginal Indians who live in primeval savagery in the jungle as the savages do about them.”* (“South by Thunderbird,” Hudson Strode, Random House, 1937.<sup>8</sup>)

ONE MIGHT ADD that of the 47,000,000 population, 11,888,000 are listed as employed, 8,860,000 being workers in agricultural, cattle and rural activities; that the wages of the majority of these workers are two milreis a day (or about twelve cents); that millions labour in peonage; that undernourishment to near starvation prevails; and that 75 per cent of the entire population is illiterate. Wealth in contrast to extreme poverty; culture to illiteracy; vast distances, and few roads and railroads (one mile of railroad to ten in the U.S.A.). Unlimited and varied resources and a single crop economy; and instead of the enjoyment of that generous security of livelihood which so rich a land could yield – to, it has been reckoned, twenty times its present millions – the

people live in bondage to foreign capital and in hazardous dependence upon foreign markets. Brazil was never colonized; it has been exploited.

The history of Brazil is a tragic story of successive exploitations leading each in turn to ruin and revolt. And although the progress of Brazil for the past hundred and sixteen years has seemed to be through independence toward democracy would appear to have been as contrary to the genius of its Latin peoples as of the Indians and Negroes who through slavery have come to be called citizens. Reared in independence on the big estates, subject to an economy over which they had no control, and to a government that was remote and not of them, the people were as apathetic toward their democratic rights when these were constitutional as they show themselves to be to-day at their repeal.

On the afternoon of 25<sup>th</sup> November, close in the wake of the November *coup d'état*, Jerome Davis and I, representing the National Committee for People's Rights and the Joint Committee for the Defence of the Brazilian People, arrived in Rio de Janeiro to inquire into the political situation, sense out the public mind, and come to such conclusions as might be of value to the American public in judging of Brazil as friendly neighbour. We had nine days to do it in. We bore credentials: mine were in the form of personal introductions – of what proved to be one of the most friendly and helpful nature – from the Brazilian Ambassador, Señor Oswaldo Aranha in Washington; and Davis had, besides several personal letters, including one from the son of President Vargas to his father, a number of official introductions of importance. Arrived in Rio, we proceeded to a hotel on the Copacabana strand. We bathed, changed, dined, strolled for a while, and went to bed, relieved that we'd arrived, that no hotel attendant would come knocking at our doors at dawn or earlier to get us to the plane. We slept. If what now follows has no place in a “report” it may at least inconsequentially enliven it, and suggest something of the atmosphere or cloud under which we, in common with the Brazilian people, were to find ourselves.

While I nodded, nearly napping –

(I was, of course, really dead to the world)

While I nodded, nearly napping,

Suddenly there came a tapping,

As of someone gently rapping,  
Rapping at my chamber door:  
“‘Tis some visitor,” I muttered,  
“Tapping at my chamber door –  
Only this and nothing more.”

“Get outa there,” I roared. “Leave me alone. I want to sleep. I’m not taking the plane. Go’way.” And plunging my head into the pillow, I drew up the sheet to cover it.

The tapping, gentle but insidious, kept on.

I grabbed the telephone, and roared a good old-fashioned Anglo-Saxon complaint into Portuguese ears. I hung up. I laid my head on the mattress and the pillow on my head.

That tapping – it had never stopped – came through.

The ‘phone rang. God – is this a mad-house! “What is it, what” –

“It is the police,” came the voice of the gentle porter.

*Such* visitors, at such an hour! (It was, of course, exactly midnight.) Switching on the light and swathing myself in something or other, I opened the door with such expressions of apology and welcome as I thought would make us all very happy. One has no *rights* where there’s a “State of war”. But friends! – there’s where you need them.

I let three fellows in, plain-clothes men of the secret police, it proved. They demanded my papers, all of them, every last scrap. In one corner of the room stood my brief-case, open about two inches. From the other corner of the room I took my passport and, scarcely looking to aim, scaled it toward and *into* the brief-case. The police beamed their admiration. I patted my chest, and we all laughed. I handed around cigarettes, and proceeded to point out crannies that might have served me for the concealment of documents. When they had ransacked the place, they told me to dress. They were, by now, entirely friendly and polite. I dressed, and almost arm-in-arm we went down and out and into a waiting taxi.

They conveyed me to the central police station in front of which lolled two dilapidated, diminutive, and very sleepy soldiers, with bayoneted guns much taller than their hands. We ascended in an elevator to

just such a courtyard corridor as that from which Barron had plunged to his death. I was told to sit down in a waiting room. I lit a cigarette and studied a map of Brazil. Ten minutes later a door opened and I was summoned into the presence of the Lieutenant.

At the desk of the Lieutenant and separated from him by a vacant chair sat a fat man, as unkempt, unshaven, dirty, as you’d find at large. “I speak English,” said this man, with unconvincing accent. “I am the interpreter. Sit down.”

I took the vacant chair.

“We have brought you here,” said the Lieutenant with the utmost courtesy, “to aid you in the work for which you have come to Brazil. We want to help you.”

I beamed my pleasure. “Oh, thank you very much!” I said, and grinned. So did they all, so pleasantly.

“We have taken your papers,” continued the Lieutenant, “in order to safeguard them for you. We don’t want anything to happen to them.”

“How kind, how wonderful!” I cried and shook his hand. “How can I ever thank you for your thoughtfulness! How can I thank you all!” I laughed for happiness, and so did everyone.

Now, while both Davis and I *had* possessed a number of documents and pamphlets of so tactless a nature as would have involved us in difficulties, these had long ago been torn into little bits and, via the toilet of the plane, consigned to the Atlantic Ocean. All had been thrown away – but one; of its damning presence among my papers had I not from the first entrance of the police been painfully aware! It was a long list of the most eminent of those Brazilian prisoners about whose welfare we were to inquire. Caught with the goods? Best make a virtue of the crime.

“At your offer of assistance, Lieutenant,” I addressed him, “I am delighted and grateful. And because of your offer – so generously made – I will now, at this fortunate moment, ask for certain information for which I had intended coming to you. Where,” – searching in my brief-case and producing the document – “are these gentlemen? Where are they? Are they well?” I handed him the list: he looked at it.

As at the explosion of a bomb in a gay market place at festive noon, the crowd is suddenly transfixed with horror, indignation, hatred, fear – so, at this first

glance at the first name was changed the good Lieutenant. “Prestes!” he cried, and all the room recoiled, recoiled and glared at me. “Prestes! You know him? What of him?” and as he read more names, their horror grew.

“Who gave you this?” “Your countrymen,” I said.

“And do you know these men?” “Not yet.”

At last, fiercely, he took the brief-case, stuffed in the damning document, and put the whole thing out of reach. The moment had arrived for cigarettes.

Lighting the Lieutenant’s, I embraced him.

“You’re an American?” I asked the interpreter, clapping his dirty knee.

Someone recounted my amazing passport shot: they liked that shot. We laughed – and all was well. He’s “Muy simpatico,” said one. “You bet!” I said: agreed.

Dismissed to return to my hotel, I suggested that they honour me with that style of police escort to which I was accustomed. “Besides,” I added, “how about the other fellow, Davis?” We might as well get everything cleaned up.

The spasm which the mention of Davis brought on was dissipated when the Lieutenant was assured that Jerome Davis was not the American Labour defender, David Levinson. Still, they would look him over. My three friends stood up to go with me.

“May we all stop for a drink, Lieutenant?” I asked.

“No,” said the Lieutenant, sternly.

“Please, just a little one?” Two more men joined our party.

“N-no.”

The six of us marched out.

“That’s what you get from this damned Fascism,” muttered one of us – not I.

We all crowded into a cab and, sitting in each other’s laps, drove to a café. I ordered double highballs, and proceeded to discourse on the labour movement, the C.I.O., and how the working people of the world were going to run the world. They beamed approval.

“Here’s to the revolution!” I said, and raised my glass. We drank to it.

Davis was splendid. Jumped out of bed to let us in. Beamed welcome as I said: “My friends.” And when I added, “The police,” got back in bed. The police didn’t do much but grow more and more embarrassed as I searched the room for contraband. They looked ashamed at having come. And as at last the door closed and locked itself behind the Professor’s brief-case and the policemen’s backs, Davis lifted his head from his pillow and lifted the pillow from the bed. There lay his passport, wallet, *and* his copy of the damning list.

Next morning we called at the American Embassy, told our story. And that afternoon the assistant to the Ambassador arrived at our hotel in company with a police detective; and with our brief-cases. The only thing that was not returned was the list of political prisoners. The Ambassador’s assistant informed me that I was under serious suspicion, that I might be ordered to keep to my hotel room until the next plane left. They kept some check on my telephone calls, but as far as I know, didn’t trail me. I was allowed to stay. Policemen, sometimes, give them half a chance, aren’t bad. Davis, from that time on – we so agreed – pursued his work unhampered by that suspect, me.

The plans to send us to Brazil were initiated in June, 1937, during a conference with Ambassador Aranha in Washington, at which the notorious mistreatment of political prisoners under the Getulio Vargas régime was discussed and protested again. Before the departure of the committee five months later, there had successively occurred in Brazil, first, a termination of the internal so-called “State of War” in favour of a more liberal “State of Emergency”; secondly, a return to the “State of War” and with it more arrests; and thirdly, a *coup d’état* by which the pending elections were called off, the incumbency of President Getulio Vargas perpetuated, and the democratic constitution supplanted by a mandatory one.

“What you see here to-day is not Brazil. The Brazilian people will not tolerate dictatorship. You may quote me as saying that.” So spoke H. Sobral Pinto, the eminent and courageous conservative Catholic attorney who defended Prestes in his trial for treason. So, in fact, said many others whom I met in Rio. Yet they do tolerate it. And that Getulio Vargas should walk the streets of Rio as a private citizen, unwatched,

unguarded, may be taken as evidence not only of the inherent gentleness of Brazilians, but of their thoroughgoing unconcern with government. They want democracy and they want peace. They want freedom from censorship, from espionage, from fear. They want to work, to live securely, to be well-fed; they want leisure and happiness. Let soldiers fight; the people, they want peace. Consequently, as government is thought of as a power apart, so are revolts against it left to those to whom armed violence is a trade.

In the heat of the Prestes rebellion, a bicycle rider came to where troops were shooting at each other across the avenue. He rang his bell. The troops stopped shooting while he passed.

The recent *coup d'état* was accomplished without a shot being fired. Concerning the soldiers who were assembled in Rio and marched about the streets, people said, "Vargas is counting his constituents."

I was in Rio during the delayed celebrations of Flag Day. The occasion was to be of special interest, celebrating not only the continuance of the Vargas régime but, by the burning of the flags of the Brazilian States, that stronger union of the States which the new constitution provided. A fair-sized crowd attended, no larger than to leave quite undisturbed the daily aspect of the city thoroughfares. And troops were there: soldiers in white, in green; and guards resplendent in Napoleonic dress. And companies of men, of little boys and girls, in the *Integralista's* green and white. Pretty enough – but no one cared. Not until noon-time when the troops marched home: "They *would* block the traffic at the noon hour!" said a characteristic onlooker.

Brazil, exploited for centuries in the interests of Portuguese imperialism and, subsequently, of international imperialism – an exploitation internally abetted by the larger Brazilian landowners and the upper urban bourgeoisie – is to-day primarily obligated to and, consequently, in bondage to American and British capital. This financial bondage to the Democratic powers has, however, failed both to secure to those powers that monopoly of Brazilian trade which might be held to be their due and to protect their interests against the growing influence of the Fascist powers on Brazilian policy and Brazilian internal affairs. This influence, unless it is checked by the action of Great Britain and

the United States, or rejected by a militant democracy within Brazil, must lead eventually to a sharp decline in American-Brazilian trade, to a collapse of securities, and to such a Pan-American situation as may challenge the Monroe Doctrine and even menace American democracy. Neither the evils of Fascism, nor – relative to what exists to-day – its questionable blessings, as they may exclusively affect people of Brazil, are to be held the proper concern of the American government. That policy of isolation which has made us officially unconcerned with the depredations of fascist Italy and Germany in friendly Spain, which has blithely tolerated the barbarous aggression of Japan in China, will not be altered to defend the Brazilian people against the heartless civil persecutions which Brazilian tyrants in their march toward fascism practise. What governments have hearts? They are, and properly, the instruments of public interests. And that those "interests" which have so far been exclusively effective in determining international policy have earned the stigma of italics, merely betrays the importance of our humanity. Are we much moved at the herding into Brazilian prisons of thousands of innocent men and women, at the savage tortures inflicted upon many of them, at official murders? Yes, we are moved: not much. Are even the masses in Brazil – those masses that, now suffering most, have most to gain by freedom through revolt, whose kind, whose relatives and friends, whose leaders are the tortured and imprisoned victims of dictatorship – are they much moved? They are. Much moved. And yet – they are so poor, so ignorant, so destitute of arms, so frightened and oppressed – not moved enough.

They were not moved enough to win the 1922 revolt, nor in the 1924-6 uprising to carry Prestes through to victory. In 1930 they were led by promises of great reforms to overthrow Sao Paulo's domination; and in 1932 to crush Sao Paulo's comeback and retain their "Liberal", Vargas, in Dictatorship. But Prestes lived. Strengthened in purpose and matured in mind he plotted while in exile for the liberation of his country. A railway strike precipitated the half-organized revolt. In the north it was suppressed by the ruthless bombardment of the cities; in Rio de Janeiro by the overpowering of a regiment. Prestes had become an avowed communist; and it is neither to be doubted that other communists, including the

German Ewart, were co-leaders with himself, nor the entire communist party of Brazil stood with him and with the National Liberation Alliance. But the charge of “Communist!” which Vargas now directed, and continues against all sympathizers with the Prestes revolt and with the cause of Democracy in general was in fact no more than a pretext for such arrests and persecutions as might secure the Dictator in power and exalt him in the public mind as the saviour of Brazil. Its purpose was to scare: Brazilians laugh. By all of this too few are moved enough.

A “State of War”: all civil liberties annulled. And Vargas Dictator. Yet the Constitution with its provisions for Democratic government remained, a standing reproach and a consequent embarrassment to autocracy. Under the Constitution the President’s seven-year term now neared its close: a second term was banned. Consequently the summer of 1937 saw a Presidential election campaign in full swing, with every outward show that the electoral provisions of the Constitution were to be observed. Again as in 1930 and in the Paulista uprising of 1932 it was a conflict between the special and more local interests of the coffee growers, manufacturers and capitalists of rich Sao Paulo supported by the foreign interests in Brazil, and the no less special though wider interests of Rio Grande do Sul supported by the urban bourgeoisie and those liberals throughout Brazil who had formed the *Allianca Liberal* in the elections of 1930. In terms of persons the fight was between Flores da Cunha, former governor of Sao Paulo – represented by Armando Sales de Oliveira, a lawyer and corporation employé – and Flores’ implacable rival and foe, Vargas himself. Indeed, one of Vargas’ first acts upon his declaration of a “State of War” was to depose Flores. And Flores, doubtless with good judgment, fled into exile. The Vargas candidate was one José Americo de Almeida, a liberal, a friend and supporter of Vargas, and formerly Vargas’ own Minister of Communications. Americo was a writer and a man without property. He was from the north, that north of Brazil where destitution at its worst prevails. He knew the poor and felt their misery. No business man, his humanity was unrestrained by consideration of property and trade. *What* should be done was more to him than *how*. Land for the people, was his thought; end poverty. The masses thrilled to him. He felt a messianic urge: “I am

the saviour of Brazil!” he cried; “Money? I have none; but I know its whereabouts.” The politicians, scared, abandoned him: “I need no politicians,” he declared. “The people are my strength.” (This in Brazil!) The bourgeoisie, the liberals, wondered; they were soon aghast: their candidate a fool! The masses cheered.

Unless it had been the intention of Getulio Vargas from the beginning of the campaign, or before, to remain in power (and of this there is no direct evidence<sup>9</sup>) it must have been at about this juncture that he conceived the *coup d’état* and made his plans. Certainly the well-considered nature of that lengthy document, the constitution of 1937 points to long weeks of preparation. The defections of the bourgeoisie from the support of their “mad” candidate mounted at Moscow’s endorsement of him. That proved to them the opposition’s charge: and with no alternative but the hated Paulista, left them in effect disfranchised. Vargas was of this group: in what he did he counted on at least their apathy.

And there was more he counted on. Besides the two major parties originally representing the vital interests of the two States was one small but truly organized party in the field: the fascist *Integralistas* under Plinio Salgado. “We’ll toss a coin,” it was said, “to see whether Americo or Flores wins.” “But where do I come in?” asked Plinio. “You win,” they answered him, “if the coin stands on its edge.” His chances nil, he lent his aid to Vargas.

At the height of campaign bitterness and consequent disorder in the political arena, an extraordinary, authoritative proposal was made to Vargas, namely: that both the rival candidates retire from the race in favour of a compromise candidate to be agreed upon. Vargas refused. Exactly six days later, with no more turmoil than a concentration of troops in the Capitol, the General Assembly was dismissed, the Constitution was cancelled, the election was called off, and “Democracy” – what shadow of it remained – was ended. The *coup d’état* was an accomplished fact: Vargas was dictator.

As the *coup d’état* had been accomplished without bloodshed, so were there no notable, if any, subsequent disturbances. And there were relatively few arrests. The hunt for “communists” persists: few are deceived by its pretensions. People live in fear of being spied

upon, of being overheard in conversation, of being informed against. Suspects are watched, and telephone wires are trapped. Censorship has tightened. For the United Press and the Associated Press, two censors each. Censors in post offices; censors in the cable offices. A censorship for every word of printed news. To editors of the Capitol's journals assembled by official summons, government spoke: "You will be pleased to obey the new censorship regulations," it announced. "I will of course obey," answered one courageous journalist, "But I will not be pleased." Brazilian publications are forbidden to praise Soviet Russia, China, or Loyalist Spain; are forbidden to attack Italy, Germany, Japan, or General Franco; are permitted to say what they please about the United States, Great Britain, and France. They do.

"Professor:

In obedience to the decision of the Rector and until other instructions are issued, I request that the school day in each course be initiated with talks, short but incisive, directly attacking communism, either criticizing its fundamental theories or attacking the results of its practical application.

"To that end the professor in charge of the first class of the day in every course is required to make the desired discourse in accordance with the schedule."

This is to the professors of the university and to teachers everywhere. "But," said one professor, "I don't know anything about communism. Will you provide me with a book on the subject?" "Certainly not."

The Constitution, 10<sup>th</sup> November, 1937: "It has been *granted*," says Vargas, "to the Brazilian people." ... When, in 1891, Brazil became a Republic, a Constitution patterned upon that of the United States was adopted. It provided, as does ours, for an independently elected President and two Houses, and for a judiciary appointed by the President for life. With but slight alterations, this Constitution remained in force until 1934. The Constitution of 1934, promulgated by a Constituent Assembly under Vargas government, established the secret ballot and granted votes to women, without, however, extending the electorate beyond the limited ranks of the literate. It established Courts of Electoral Justice with authority not only in

electoral disputes but over the eligibility of electors under the law. This power, applied to the 1934 Constitution's new provision for functional representation – which, favouring employers, was distinctly Fascist – strengthened the control of the government over the federal Congress. The 1934 Constitution enfranchised monks and returned the Catholic Church to power in the public schools. So Vargas won the Church. The social changes led to small advance in practice. Arrest without charge or warrant was made illegal: arrest without charge or warrant continued. The recognition it extended to unregistered unions was no effective.

What Vargas last 10<sup>th</sup> November "granted to the Brazilian people" is, in effect, a grant to them of himself as permanent Dictator of their lives and property and destinies. Read from his Constitution: -

It is the prerogative of the President to decree a state of emergency and a state of war...

In the event of a foreign menace or the imminence of internal perturbations, or the existence of a concerted effort, plan or conspiracy, which tends to perturb the public peace or to place in danger the structure of the institutions, of the security of the State or of its citizens, the President of the Republic may declare throughout the whole territory particularly menaced, a state of emergency.

The moment that it is necessary to employ the armed forces for the defence of the state, the President of the republic shall declare a state of war for the whole national territory or part of same.

Sole paragraph – For none of these acts it is necessary to obtain the authorization of the National Parliament, which may not suspend the state of emergency or the state of war, declared by the President of the Republic.

(Art.'s 73,166.)

At least there might be a misunderstanding of the complete unhindered despotism which, at his own discretion, becomes Getulio Vargas' "Constitutional" right, his "grant" to Brazil further states: "During the existence of the state of war such parts of the Constitution, as the President of the Republic indicates, will cease to be in force." *L'état c'est Moi!*

More important, consequently, than further study of constitutional provisions will be an inquiry

into the character, affiliations, and policies of the man who has so adroitly brought Brazil's short run as a republic to a close. The very ease with which, without a numerous following and on the very ground where two strong parties struggled for control, he stole the prize, reveals what is conceded him: political dexterity. A man of charm and culture, of will to power unhampered by either loyalty or convictions, an opportunist, a juggler of opposing forces, he is outstandingly a bold adventurer in politics. His policies as expressed by his declared administration programme, and concealed amidst the verbiage of his Constitution may not be taken seriously.

“Build up the Army and Navy; build railroads and highways; establish the people on the land.” And in that order! Why, with no foreign-power threat, more arms? – unless it be for the support in power of Vargas! And, with the country bankrupt, how? Why railroads, highways? For what *markets*? And for *what*? More people owning, cultivating land is sound: it should come first. There is much in the Constitution which is aimed at strengthening the federal power at the expense of that of the separate States: “the armed forces are permanent *national* institutions, organized on the basis of... faithful obedience to the authority of the President of the Republic... military operations being the province and responsibility of the commanders-in-chief, *freely chosen by him*.” (Italics supplied). The federal government is given wide powers of intervention in the states' internal affairs, even in compelling the passage of prescribed laws, in supplanting the States' government, and in dismembering their territories. Labour is invited to organize; its organizations *may* be “recognized”; strikes and lock-outs are declared illegal.

Vargas is armed by his own Constitution to make his power absolute at will, and, if he will, to make his tenure permanent. Moreover, even without the declaration of those states of “Emergency” and “War” by which the President's personal powers are legally enlarged, the Constitution bestows such normal powers upon the chief executive and his party as to ensure their domination. Brazil is saddled with dictatorship; Vargas is mounted: does that Dictatorship mean fascism?

“The Italian Nation,” writes Mussolini (and “The Italian Nation” as conceived by him must be

accepted as the pattern of the fascist state) “is an organism having ends, a life and means superior in power and duration to the single individuals or groups of individuals composing it. It is a moral, political and economic unit which finds its integral realization in the fascist state.” It is the Corporate State, whose Corporations are “the instrument which, under the aegis of the State, carries out the complete organic and Unitarian regulation of production with a view to the expansion of the wealth, political power, and well-being of the... people.” Private enterprise is as essential to fascism as to Capitalistic Democracy. Dictatorship by the state – or by an individual personifying the state – is as essential to fascism as it has been to “Communism” in the U.S.S.R., as it was to the Greek Tyrannies and the Roman Empire, as it is at present for the maintenance in *status quo* of the Latin-American governments. “The complete organic and Unitarian regulation of production,” the *control* of private enterprise, and the control – absolute, repressive, benevolent (as it may be) of labour, is essential and peculiar to fascism. By such purposeful control of the resources, instruments and forces of production and of the lives of the producers, reconciled, somehow, with the maintenance of class divisions, wealth, and special privilege, is fascism to be defined.

If we allow this definition, and turn again to an examination of the Vargas Constitution of 1937 we shall find little that condemns it – or exalts it – as a distinctly fascist instrument. Its restrictions upon organized labour are definitely of fascist inspiration, though its generalizations concerning the State's responsibility for labour's welfare are too evasive to be taken seriously. The Constitution is, in fact, chiefly concerned with such repressive measures as may fortify the employer in his exploitation of labour without in any way, except through taxation, making him responsible to the State or, through the State, contributory to the advancement of Brazil. The Constitution is forceful and concise in its definition of Federal (i.e., Presidential) rights, and evasive of responsibility. We look for programme, plan; for – with fascism in mind – an intention, hidden or expressed, to found a true totalitarian State. It isn't there. Nor in the public utterances of the genial Vargas (and of the nature of these I only judge by the impression they have made upon the public mind) does he appear a fascist. He has, to be sure, accepted the support

of the *Integralistas*, a militant fascist minority which, to swell its paltry ranks, paraded its little boys and girls in uniform. But whether the recent decree superficially disbanding the *Integralistas* – and, incidentally, and not superficially, all national political organizations, including labour – be considered as a sop to public opinion, or as an act of principle – or prudence – Vargas is not – not yet – their instrument.

Nor is Vargas termed a fascist even by the Brazilian liberals and advocates of democracy, or, to my knowledge, by the radicals. That estimate of his character which has been given is the Brazilians' estimate; political adventurer without important following; the fulcrum – so it was expressed to me – of a political see-saw, maintaining his precarious, isolated position by the manipulation of opposing forces. That European fascist influence is active in Brazil is not to be disputed. Yet the reason for this is primarily economic. Brazil wants trade: and trade with fascist nations entails friendliness. Brazil is open to fascist influence, and that influence is the more welcome in that it is consistent with the Church's stand on Spain. Vargas is Dictator: from Mussolini, Hitler, Franco – hands – warm, heartening hands – across the sea.

That fascism is *not* established in Brazil, that it is not even definitely aimed at, must in no degree be attributed to the *principles* of Brazil's Dictator. Politically speaking, Vargas, the opportunist, has none – but to keep in power. Neither the road to power nor, once there, its bulwark – in Brazil, to-day – is fascism. It is not fascism because not the foreign interests in Brazil, nor the Brazilian plantation owners and manufacturers, nor the urban bourgeoisie, want fascism. Not yet.

They want, as I have said, democracy and peace. They want to live in the enjoyment of such civil liberty as is consistent with civilization. The employers want to be free to exploit labour, and free of responsibility for the results of exploitation. Labour wants freedom to organize and strike. The masses want democracy, that through it somehow they may colonize their land, grow prosperous, grow rich, employ and exploit labour. Brazil is undeveloped, immature. It, and its people, are no more ready for fascism than they showed themselves to be, when Prestes struck, for communism. Give them democracy: they want it.

Perhaps the most serious aspect of the situation created by the new Constitution is that a return to democracy or even, lacking the Dictator's willingness, to a change of Dictator, is now virtually impossible in Brazil but by means of revolution. Even the voicing of discontent and the discussion of change are to-day unconstitutional; while such purposeful political organizing by an opposition as is not only legal under a democracy but essential to its life becomes of necessity a plot, to be hatched in secrecy and fear, and born in violence. Those political persecutions which have been the order under Vargas will continue in all their crass injustice and unspeakable barbarity as long as opposition lives and fear of it endures. The jails are crowded: not the courts. The prisoners aren't charged, aren't tried. They're beaten, tortured for "confessions" – that shall lead to more arrests, more tortures, more arrests; more glory to the nation's guardian. Who cares! They're used to such things in Brazil. They're used to government in which they have small part, to constitutions that are mockeries, to Dictators. That Ewart's wife was hideously and obscenely tortured before the husband's eyes, in fact. Chermont's disclosure of his tortures, before the Brazilian Senate, no one disputes. Such things are hardly news in Rio. "That's the police all over," people say. I think it is.

"How," an American may ask himself, "would our police behave but for our cheeks on them? Our freedom of the press, exposure, prosecution, our La Follette Committee, our Democracy? What *have* and they done despite control – in Puerto Rico, Hoboken, Chicago, Gallup? And while a realization of the actual and potential barbarity of our own police will not mitigate our horror at the greater and more extensive barbarities of the police under Vargas, it will incline us to view the latter as in no degree an expression of an inherent cruelty in the Brazilian nature, nor even of the exceptional cruelty and vindictiveness of Vargas himself. The evil thrives in un-democracy.

The Dictator, in fact, is not a cruel man. He, Vargas, it is said prevented his military aides from executing the leaders of the Prestes revolt. "Vargas," the people say, "will never kill." And while the new Constitution does permit of capital punishment – for the first time in, at least recent, Brazilian history – this is not generally regarded as expressive of his leanings. For the sake of understanding the Brazilian situation,

and of properly and seriously fearing what may come of it, let us give the Dictator his due: Vargas, is, personally, widely liked.

The statement of the conservative attorney, Sr. Pinto (quoted early in this report), “The Brazilian people will not tolerate dictatorship,” may, in my mind, be taken as expressing Brazil. Yet Vargas rules. Americo, the candidate of the masses, sits, a virtual prisoner, in his little house in the suburbs of Rio. He is an unassuming, gentle, quiet little man and looks out somewhat sadly on a world that to his painfully near-sighted eyes must seem a formless blur. “I fought for the poor,” he said to me, “for the people. I wanted democracy: that is all.” He spoke as though his life, his world were all within himself. The world must come to him, so he can see it. “When they come to me again,” he said, “when they want me, I’ll be ready.” Until then, gently and quietly, he’ll wait. He’d better!

“We are bewildered.” So spoke the leading journalist of Rio; a liberal. Nine days I stayed in Rio, a stranger ignorant of the language, dependent in conversation on the greater culture of my friends and those I interviewed, or on interpreters. I talked freely, often to the great embarrassment of my listeners. I was believed, I think, and trusted. Men talked freely with me – *sotto voce*; I believed them. This report is the record of my impressions and, unfortunately maybe, more than that. I’ve tried to bring some order into my bewilderment. That’s dangerous. Take this report with caution.

“Please,” said Ambassador Aranha as I left him, “write nothing about Brazil that will disturb the friendship between Brazilians and Americans,” I trust I haven’t. Let me go further and attempt to strengthen it. “All the American business men,” said an American business man to me in Rio, “say that Vargas is going to stop his nonsense and play ball.” Good: let’s play ball. With Vargas at the bat, let’s strike him out.

<sup>1</sup> KENT, Rockwell. “Brazil and Vargas”. *Life and Letters Today* 18, n.12 (summer, 1938): pp.15-27. [Kent Coll. Series 2B-7].

<sup>2</sup> Rockwell Kent, autor do artigo *Brazil and Vargas*, nasceu a 21 de junho de 1882 e faleceu a 13 de março de 1971. Oriundo de uma família burguesa americana de Tarrytown, no estado de Nova York, Rockwell Kent desde cedo manifestou aptidões sérias para as artes. Aos 15 anos, já era profissional em pintura de porcelanas, na oficina de sua tia Jo, a quem Rockwell, sua mãe viúva e irmãos recorriam nas horas difíceis. Desde cedo, então, Rockwell passou a se dedicar ao desenho e à pintura. Entretanto, quando uma bolsa de estudos na Escola de Arte de Nova York lhe foi oferecida, Rockwell, por pressões familiares, acabou não aceitando, o que o levou a matricular-se na Escola de Arquitetura na Universidade Columbia, em 1900. De seu contato com a

arquitetura, Rockwell realizou importantes projetos que também se refletiram em sua vida pessoal. In: JOHNSON, Fridolf. *Rockwell Kent: an anthology of his works*. New York: Alfred. A. Knopf, 1981.

<sup>3</sup> “*L’Etat c’est moi*”. Tradução da autora.

<sup>4</sup> Rascunho para o relatório, sem data especificada.

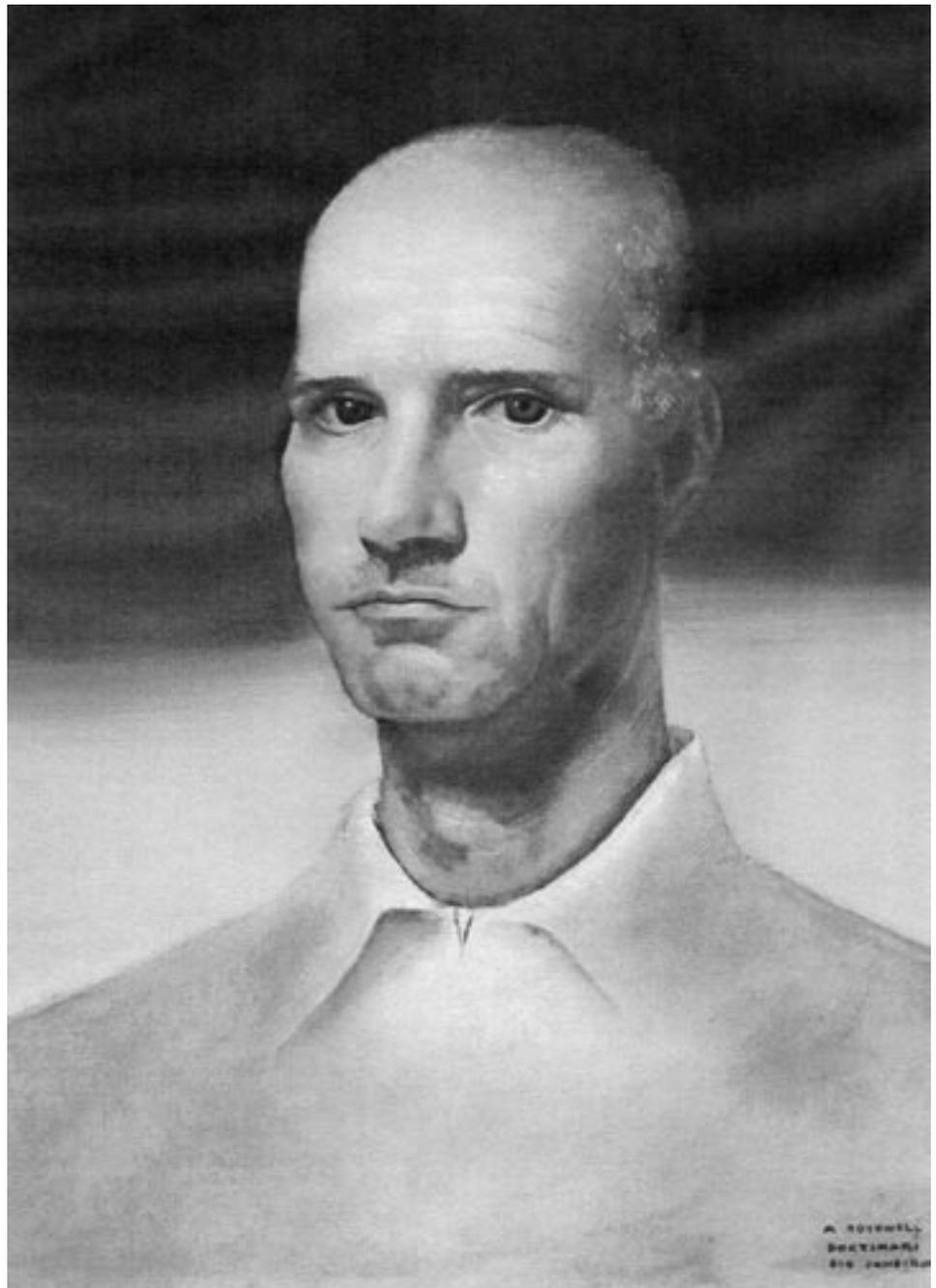
<sup>5</sup> FABRIS, Annateresa. *Portinari: pintor social*. SP: Edusp, 1990.

<sup>6</sup> KENT, Rockwell & LEÃO, Josias. *Portinari: His Life and Art*. Chicago: The University Press of Chicago, 1940.

<sup>7</sup> KENT, Rockwell. “Brazil and Vargas”. *Life and Letters Today* 18, n.12 (summer, 1938): pp.15-27. [Kent Coll. Series 2B-7].

<sup>8</sup> England, Hamish Hamilton.

<sup>9</sup> It is now known that the constitution was ready in May, and that the *coup d’état* was scheduled for June.



1 Candido Portinari.  
*Retrato de Rockwell Kent, 1937*