



**Barbara Weinstein.** *For Social Peace in Brazil Industrialists and the Remaking of the Working Class in São Paulo, 1920-1964.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996. xvii + 435 pp. \$35.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8078-4602-5; \$59.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8078-2297-5.



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## The Discourse of Brazilian Social Peace

Barbara Weinstein's *For Social Peace in Brazil* is a superlative investigation of a most perplexing topic, the efforts by São Paulo's industrial elite to organize Brazil's industrialization along productive lines, guide the concomitant working class formation, and win the vanguard position within their own class. To accomplish those goals, the Paulista industrial elite, which included engineers and educators specializing in industrialization, competed for discursive supremacy. Weinstein finds ample evidence of a discursive battle in the history of with two state mandated, but privately controlled, agencies: the National Service for Industrial Training (SENAI) and the Industrial Social Service (SESI). These agencies provided a site upon which the Paulista industrial elite constructed and articulated an ideology of rationalized production, enlightened management, modern labor relations, and social peace that eventually would dominate the political and economic discourse among fellow industrialists, the military, and, even, the working class. While making her case, Weinstein makes use of an overwhelming volume of documentation, yet puts it together with a writing style that reaches the highest level of precision, thoroughness, and clarity.

As it is formulated, Weinstein's presentation is quite convincing. She starts with a review of early twentieth century ideas about rationalized production, focusing on concepts related to Taylorism, Fordism, and applied psychology. She then examines how those concepts percolated in 1920s' Brazil with informative portraits of Roberto Simonsen and Roberto Mange, two titans associated with São Paulo's industrialization. Weinstein demonstrates her savvy early on by contrasting these men's ideas and the reality of Brazilian industrial production, including Simonsen's own plants. Her contention, based primarily on one union's newspaper, that workers were already buying into the rationalization ideology raises a few doubts. Labor journalists undoubtedly remembered the black-lists and deportations following strikes of 1917 and 1919. Moreover, they would have been painfully aware that police departments still handled the bulk of labor relations. Fear, and not a perceived commonality of interests, may have encouraged labor's positive comments about rationalized production. To her credit, Weinstein explores the contradictory positions within the labor movement by including opposing points of view and abundant secondary research. These

contradictions, within both management and labor, warn the reader at an early point about this book's complexity.

Weinstein follows with a discussion of efforts to implement rationalized production and labor relations during the 1930s. This is a fine rundown of events and trends, including the Paulista elite's turn toward the state as a means to align less enlightened members of the bourgeoisie. Embedded in this account, however, is a confounding revelation that haunts much of the book. As in the preceding section, Weinstein clearly shows that the Paulista industrial elite's energies were often at odds with their less modern brethren. A high proportion, if not a majority, of Paulista industrialists resisted or entirely ignored technocratic proposals and, even, laws related to working conditions, social assistance and worker training. This begs the question, with so many industrialists rejecting rationalized production and labor relations, then can the likes of Simonsen and Mange be regarded as an elite in any sense other than their erudition in abstract theories? Weinstein reserves judgment on that question until later in the book.

SENAI's and SESI's creation occupy the next chapter. As is the pattern through much of the book, this section examines management's and labor's views of the topic at hand while placing the discussion firmly in historical context. Weinstein certainly is impressive in this regard. She makes the reader fully cognizant of the World War Two induced shortages, the Estado Novo's stifling political atmosphere, and renewed repression of dissent during the late 1940s. In this manner, she wisely hedges her statements about labor's cooperation with these agencies. Labor leaders certainly advocated concrete benefits from these agencies for their rank and file. However, with SENAI and SESI falling under employer control, their relationship to these agencies was inherently problematic. Weinstein recognizes these types of intricacies and narrates them in marvelous fashion.

The following four chapters are arguably Weinstein's finest moments. They principally explore two avenues. The first deals with efforts to shape working class skills, attitudes, and, ultimately, behavior by means of social and technical education, cultural and athletic events, and scientific restructuring of the workplace and the home. Weinstein keenly observes that SENAI and SESI stalwarts designed these programs with the assumption that workers themselves were responsible for low productivity and poor working conditions. As part of this thread, Weinstein implies that industrialists disparaged workers recently arriving from rural areas, very possibly on the ba-

sis of racial bias. This latter point is a crucial one which Weinstein might have taken a bit deeper. Nevertheless, her overall interpretation of these efforts to remold the Brazilian worker is sound and worthy of a close read.

The second avenue deals with the Paulista elite's reaction to the Populist Republic's instability, culminating in the 1964 military coup. With unions constrained by corporatist regulations, labor defended its interests in the populist political arena. Labor's political turn concerned the Paulista bourgeoisie because the industrial order which they had carefully constructed, rather than serving as a model for overall social hierarchy, might become infected with populist chaos. Therefore, industrialists acted decisively against labor's political challenges right from the Populist Republic's birth. In some instances, SESI officials and functionaries such as Eduardo Saad employed heavy-handed tactics against activists branded as communists and subversives. Meanwhile, industrialists such as Raphael Noschese used their influence over SESI to destabilize the Populist Republic and democracy in the name of anti-communism. By virtue of these actions, according to Weinstein, industrialists "helped to pave the way for the coup long before they became involved in the material preparations" (p. 322).

In the concluding chapter Weinstein addresses the vexing question raised earlier in this review, but which now has an added twist: Not only did "traditional" industrialists resist rationalized production and labor relations, but the "modern" Paulista industrial bourgeoisie itself resorted to traditional strong-arm tactics against labor, including collusion with military *golpistas*. At this point, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that SENAI, SESI, and their accompanying discourse were anything other than narcotics that occasionally deluded industrialist and worker alike. Weinstein denies that possibility by recounting that members of the Paulista elite, from Simonsen to Noschese, referred to themselves as modern, studied abroad, and "served as presidents of Rotary Clubs" (p. 340). Thus, she asserts, their participation in the 1964 coup and other covert activities, far from consistent with traditional industrialist policy, represented a modern mentality. However, at least since 1889, the Brazilian elite has invoked modernity, progress, order and social peace while conspiring with generals, implementing authoritarian rule, and repressing the labor movement. In addition, they often justified their actions with references to Brazil's "deficient" lower orders. The supposedly modern industrialists that appear in *For Social Peace in Brazil* displayed similar attitudes and behavior. Thus, rather

than breaking with the past, as Weinstein claims, the Paulista industrial elite likely repackaged traditional attitudes about production and labor within a fancier wrapper or, if you prefer, discourse.

Weinstein's assertion that the discourse of rationalized production and social peace eventually predominated among industrialists, technocrats and labor is eminently more sustainable. Especially insightful are the links which she draws between SENAI graduates, the discourse of rationalization, and labor activism. Indeed, her concluding comments invite a detailed study of how workers identified themselves within that discourse. An important question would be how SENAI graduates in Sao Paulo viewed less skilled workers and new arrivals from the Northeast. If anyone is up to such a study, Weinstein is.

Graduate students and professors specializing in Brazilian, modern Latin American or labor history must include *For Social Peace in Brazil* in their bibliographies. Unquestionably, parts of the book are contestable, but that is because the author has courageously tackled a complex problem. To date, few others have examined such an impressive array of sources, including extensive interviews, related to the industrialist discourse and efforts to remake the working class. Many other critical works will be published before this subject's final story is told. Judging by the professionalism displayed in *For Social Peace in Brazil*, a good number of them will be Weinstein's.

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