

*World War II and the Struggle for**Citizenship, 1942-1945*

After the final destruction of the Nazi tyranny, [the Allied nations] hope to see established a peace which will afford to all nations the means of dwelling in safety within their own boundaries, and which will afford assurance that all the men in all the lands may live out their lives in freedom from fear and want.

—The Atlantic Charter

São Paulo's Political Prison Has Nothing in Common with the Concentration Camps of Hitlerite Germany.

—Headline in *Diário de São Paulo*,
27 September 1942

After months of German submarine attacks against their merchant marine in the fall and winter of 1942, and heavy pressure from the United States on Vargas and his military advisers to break relations with Hitler, Brazilians throughout the country called on their leaders to join the war effort. In the wake of the torpedoing of six Brazilian ships between 15 and 19 August 1942 by the Nazis, crowds attacked and demolished German- and Italian-owned businesses in Recife, Salvador, Porto Alegre, Vitória, Belém, Manaus, and Belo Horizonte. In São Paulo and Rio crowds carrying American flags attacked suspected Axis sympathizers and demanded that Vargas declare war on Germany. Finally, on 22 August, Vargas assented to all the pressure and formally declared war on the Axis.¹

Brazil's entry into the war brought profound changes to almost every segment of its society. The twenty-five thousand soldiers of the Brazilian Expeditionary Force (Força Expedicionária Brasileira, FEB) who fought in Italy became more than just a source of great national pride; they represented Brazil's new status as an industrializing nation, even a potential world power.² Indeed, after the war, Brazilians lobbied the other Allies for a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council as a symbol of their country's new status. Throughout the war,

Vargas, Minister of Labor Alexandre Marcondes Filho, Minister of War Eurico Gaspar Dutra, and other officials proudly proclaimed not only the greatness of Brazil but also the importance of each and every Brazilian in the battle against fascism. Workers and peasants alike constantly heard on the radio discussions of their importance to the international struggle for a world in which all people could live out their lives in freedom from fear and want.

While fighting fascism in Europe, Vargas maintained his Estado Novo dictatorship at home. The Ministry of Labor still manipulated the pelego-dominated unions, and industrialists continued to rely on state intervention to increase production. The war even provided new justifications for repression against workers and others who participated in "unpatriotic" behavior, such as strikes and production slowdowns. Once again, São Paulo's workers faced the irony of Vargas's rule. They constantly heard national and local leaders promise them increased social justice, but they were also told they had to work a little harder and make a few more sacrifices for the common good.

*A Nation in Arms: Brazil Goes to War**From Dictatorship to "Democracy"*

Even before Brazil entered the war, Vargas began preparing the population for the sacrifices ahead. He reminded Brazilians of the food shortages, inflation, and other problems the cutoff of international trade brought during World War I.³ The dictator also recalled the great spurt of industrialization Brazil experienced during the war. No "antisocial" activities, such as strikes or "sabotage" in the factories, could be tolerated during this new war, he lectured. Vargas was especially worried about workers in São Paulo. He told the city's workers the military would guarantee laborers the right to "work peacefully and efficiently" during the war because "São Paulo's economy . . . is profoundly sensitive to . . . social disturbance."⁴

With Brazil's declaration of war, Vargas had to modify his regime's rhetoric. He could no longer rely on the quasi-fascist declarations of Francisco Campos, Antônio José Azevedo Amaral, Francisco José de Oliveira Vianna, or other Estado Novo ideologues to justify his labor policies. In May 1942 Vargas called on his country's workers to main-

tain social peace during the struggle against international fascism. After all, the dictator told his people, they were not "slaves" like the workers in Nazi-occupied nations; Estado Novo labor policies made Brazilian workers among the freest in the world.⁵

Vargas frequently lectured the working class on his transformation from dictator to democrat. In his September 1942 Independence Day address at Rio's Vasco da Gama Stadium, Vargas assured Brazilians that their participation in the war would make them "worthy of America, a continent of free men." Two months later, on the fifth anniversary of the Estado Novo, the dictator told the country that he had brought democracy to Brazil. Vargas termed the Estado Novo a "functional democracy," in which all citizens had access to the benefits of the state. In his New Year's message, the dictator told his people they had entered the war "to defend liberty [and] the Christian traditions of family . . . [which are] the goals for which the United Nations are fighting."⁶

Included in Vargas's and Minister of Labor Marcondes Filho's appeals to workers for efficient production in the factories were explicit promises of social justice for all. The Ministry of Labor helped industrialists wage "the battle of production" in order to allow the armies in Europe to produce a "new world, more humane and just." In his weekly radio broadcasts, Marcondes Filho spoke of workers as "the producers of Brazil's wealth" and "the force [that will] produce a more tranquil and progressive union." Workers were the great defenders of Brazil, they were producing a new Brazil with "fuller [citizen] rights, social justice, and human dignity."⁷

These constant declarations of the importance of labor to the war effort worried São Paulo's industrialists, for they did not view workers as their equals.⁸ Further, by entering the war, Brazil became an ally of the Soviet Union. Waldemar Clemente, the owner of a large metallurgy establishment, told his colleagues at a weekly meeting of the São Paulo state Federation of Industries that the alliance with the Soviets would bring "dangerous" consequences. He held up a copy of the book *Stalin, The Soviet Russian* that he had recently bought on the street. He told the other industrialists that "these books, once read by workers, immediately turn [the workers] into communists." Clemente assured his colleagues that such propaganda did not affect them because "we have a certain equilibrium that better controls our instincts."⁹ Clemente's fears may have been a little irrational, but they demonstrate the unease São Paulo's industrialists felt as Vargas, Marcondes Filho, and other officials lauded "the producers of Brazil's wealth."

Industrialists and the War Effort

São Paulo's industrialists were already profiting handsomely from the Estado Novo's program of industrial expansion and control over labor when the exigencies of wartime production created even greater opportunities. Before Brazil's entry into the war, the Federation of Industries had petitioned Vargas for special concessions to increase output in the textile sector. First, the mill owners wanted government help with transportation problems and energy shortages.¹⁰ Next, they petitioned Vargas and the Ministry of Labor to allow them to ignore regulations limiting women's night work and children's hours in the factories. These industrialists thought they could inexpensively increase output by intensifying their use of child and woman labor. At first, the Ministry of Labor did not want to grant Paulistano mill owners all these concessions, but Brazil's entry into the war provided a rationale for increasing production at any cost.¹¹

Indeed, in September 1942 the government "mobilized" so-called strategic industries such as textiles and metalworking shops. Workers in such mobilized industries could not leave their jobs without approval from management. In November 1942 the government established fines for worker absenteeism; someone absent from work for more than twenty-four hours without "just cause" could be fined three days' pay. Those who missed work for more than eight days were considered military deserters; foreign-born workers could be prosecuted for committing "sabotage" through such an absence.¹² Factory owners could also discipline workers in these industries by deciding which men were eligible for the draft.¹³ In the final analysis, although São Paulo's industrialists were unhappy with Vargas's and Marcondes Filho's rhetoric praising labor, FIESP members were quite pleased with the government's program to increase wartime production.¹⁴ Humberto Ries Costa, president of the Textile Industry Association, assured his colleagues that "the mobilization of the textile industry is perhaps the beginning of a new phase in industrial life in Brazil . . . [because] the decree seeks to discipline the workers . . . [in whom] the love of work had disappeared."¹⁵

When appeals for social peace in the name of the war effort failed to control workers, industrialists once again relied on repression. After about one hundred metalworkers at General Motors do Brasil struck on the morning of 6 June 1942, for example, the political police (DOPS) immediately intervened. The DOPS arrested the leaders of the factory

Table 4.1 Index of Industrial Output in the State of São Paulo, 1935–1945 (1935 = 100)

Year	Metallurgy	Textiles	Total manufacturing
1935	100.0	100.0	100.0
1936	131.9	109.1	111.5
1937	131.0	124.9	123.6
1938	183.1	115.2	135.2
1939	217.6	122.9	164.5
1940	214.4	137.0	182.1
1941	230.8	181.3	222.6
1942	239.3	206.3	210.1
1943	247.6	221.9	221.7
1944	261.1	163.4	220.8
1945	316.6	149.7	203.5

Source: A. V. Villela and W. Suzigan, "Government Policy and the Economic Growth of Brazil, 1889–1945," *Brazilian Economic Studies* 3 (1977): 297.

commission, and work resumed that afternoon.¹⁶ The government also worked diligently to remind workers of its monopoly on violence. A lead article in 27 September 1942 edition of the *Diário de São Paulo* detailed the operation of one of Vargas's political prisons. The story's headline proclaimed: "São Paulo's Political Prison Has Nothing in Common with the Concentration Camps of Hitlerite Germany." The article refuted claims that the prisoners were not well fed or clothed. The story's double message was lost on no one: Brazil was an Allied country, but it maintained political prisons for those who opposed the Vargas dictatorship.¹⁷

Near complete control of workers' organizations and the frequent use of repression profoundly aided Paulistano industrialists' efforts to expand production. Industrial output grew at an average rate of 6.5 percent per year in the 1939–45 period, and the metallurgy sector expanded 7.5 percent per year. Textiles expanded at about 25 percent per year from 1939 to 1943, and then experienced a downturn (table 4.1).¹⁸ The war, like the first five years of the Estado Novo, spurred an industrial expansion that laid the basis for future growth by increasing infrastructure development, the capital goods sector, and the supply of skilled and semiskilled labor.

With North American and British industry producing goods almost

exclusively for their war efforts, Brazilian textile mills, led by those in São Paulo, expanded their markets, exporting to Argentina, Chile, Bolivia, South Africa, and other countries.¹⁹ This steady expansion continued until mid-1944, and then, although production dipped, it remained well above prewar levels.²⁰ Industrialists ran their equipment at full capacity during the war years. This increased their dependence on workers' ability to keep the mills' older machines operating.²¹ Although the state Department of Labor enforced wartime measures tying workers to their jobs, the shortage of textile workers was so acute during the war that some mill owners raided rivals' factories for the much needed semiskilled labor. Throughout the war, the FIESP studied various ways to increase the supply of skilled and semiskilled workers for the textile and other industries.²²

Industrialists achieved growth in the textile sector by increasing the hours worked per worker rather than by increasing the number of laborers in the mills. The city of São Paulo, unlike other parts of Brazil, experienced severe shortages of skilled and semiskilled industrial workers beginning in 1936 and lasting beyond 1945. Although many people migrated to São Paulo during the war years, they made up a pool of surplus labor that was not easily employed in the city's textile mills. Many of the migrants worked as peddlers or garbage collectors, or simply returned to the rural sector. The U.S. consul in São Paulo reported in 1944, for example, that "the interesting feature of these figures [on employment levels in São Paulo] is the relatively small increase which has taken place during the war boom. The total amounts to less than 10% over the three years and accounts to a great extent for the general shortage of labor as it indicates a very small reserve even in 1941." So, throughout the war, demand for textile workers far outstripped supply.²³ Weavers had in the past taken advantage of such situations by switching mills to receive higher wages, but the wartime restrictions on mobility limited this practice.²⁴

As I have explained, the metallurgy sector expanded steadily in the 1930s. Some metalworkers managed to open new small machine shops, and industrialists founded large establishments that produced metal products from steel sheets to complex machinery. The value of the metallurgy sector in general increased 48 percent, and that of machine production grew 50 percent between 1938 and 1943.²⁵ During the war, production was so great that the FIESP and government officials worried that many establishments would suffer shortages of skilled labor and raw materials, but the federal government managed to increase

supplies of metals and began modest training programs for workers to keep machine production going through the difficult times in 1943 and 1944.²⁶

Industrialists realized their production techniques were antiquated and that their products would not have survived international competition with U.S. and British goods. No matter, they demonstrated great pride in the advances in machine production during the war. The new *Revista Industrial de São Paulo* often carried a photo of some machine produced in the city on its cover, and its pages were filled with ads for the latest products from the area's machine shops.²⁷ A good example of São Paulo's new metallurgy establishments is Sofunge (Sociedade Técnica de Fundições Gerais). Engineers and industrialists came together in 1942 to found this company, which produced wheels and other equipment for railroad cars. They opened a factory in the Vila Anatólio neighborhood and soon began hiring skilled workers and training others. Sofunge flourished during the war and continued to supply São Paulo's growing vehicle industry in the years after 1945.²⁸

The city's industrialists recognized that the Estado Novo and the war had created opportunities for future expansion as well as immediate profits. In June 1942, FIESP president Roberto Simonsen suggested that his fellow industrialists limit simple profit taking and use some of the surplus extracted from labor to reinvest in new machinery. He was not the only one to spot the huge profits (later estimated by economists at about 40 percent per year) taken by textile and other entrepreneurs. Finance Minister Artur de Souza Costa returned to Rio from a 1942 trip to São Paulo and noted that the textile industry seemed to be taking "excessive" profits.²⁹ Further, the U.S. consul pointed out in 1944 that the textile and metallurgy sectors were not only growing at high rates, they were producing profits of between 30 and 40 percent for industrialists at the expense of the working class. Such discussions became public by 1944. While FIESP members secretly debated what each should do with the fantastic surpluses they had recently accumulated, segments of the press editorialized against the Estado Novo's creation of such wealth through violence against labor.³⁰ Of course, this was one of the basic goals of the Estado Novo: the state would control the labor market so industrial development could progress. The wage squeeze and accompanying deterioration in workers' buying power would then be alleviated through the use of corporate welfare programs and social services through the co-opted unions.

Workers on the Home Front

Brazil's entry into the war created yet another context for intensifying the already harsh work regimes in the city's factories. Conrado de Papa, who began working in metallurgy as a boy in the 1930s, recalled that the sector's boom during the war required most establishments to operate nearly twenty-four hours per day, seven days a week; workers actually slept in the shops between long shifts. Papa added that when someone protested to the Ministry of Labor or state Department of Labor about having to work Saturday and Sunday, which violated the labor code, or against the great increases in the number of accidents at the factory, that person often ended up in jail for a few days.³¹ Others recalled how the intense work loads of the war years kept them from any other activities. Edson Borges, who worked in a small shop in Brás, noted that he and his colleagues often talked at lunch about changing things, but they had no chance to organize: "We worked seven days a week, all day and night in those days. We didn't have any time to deal with these political issues."³²

Industrialists increased production both by intensifying work regimes and by installing more equipment in the factories. Metalúrgicos from this era recalled how this haphazard growth made the factories even more dangerous. According to José Albertino, in order "to increase production [factory owners] installed one more machine and one more machine, and another. Then, the [work area] of each worker became much more compressed. . . . In whatever space a machine could fit, the boss put one more machine because he needed the production."³³ These conditions appeared to increase the accident rate. Geraldo Pascolato recalled that sometimes there seemed to be more accidents in the Máquinas Piratininga factory than machines built: "Guys were always being told to do their pieces too quickly. You couldn't work safely that way." According to Antônio Lombardi, "We all had something drop on us or something, but some of the companheiros were really hurt. Killed, you know."³⁴ Workers fought these speedups in a variety of ways (described in the next section), but during the war they often had to accept the higher production quotas. Not only was this new regime more dangerous, it robbed skilled workers of the pride they took in producing quality machines.³⁵

Once again, industrialists relied on the authoritarian industrial relations system to break the bargaining power of the highly skilled

Table 4.2 Industrial Wages and the Cost of Living in São Paulo, 1940-1945

Year	Average factory wage ^a	Real minimum wage index	Cost-of-living index
1940	1.05	98.02 ^b	107 ^c
1941	1.25	89.35	119
1942	1.30	80.22	132
1943	1.50	78.78	153
1944	2.00	83.19 ^d	210
1945	2.00	67.03	259

Source: São Paulo to Washington, D.C., "Employment Statistics for the State of São Paulo," SP Post 850, 18 November 1944, RG 84, NA; FIESP, *Relatório*, 1946, 4-162; DIEESE, "Objetivos e Características do Plano Cruzado III," 17 June 1987, and Seiti Kaneko Endo and Heron Carlos Esvaldo do Carmo, *Breve Histórico do Índice de Preços ao Consumidor no Município de São Paulo* (São Paulo: FIPE, 1985), 17.

^aCruzeiros per hour. In 1942 the government changed the currency from the milreiros to the cruzeiro.

^bThis index begins with July 1940, which equals 100, but all years are calculated in October.

^c1939 = 100.

^dVargas increased the minimum wage in 1943 for 1944.

metalúrgicos. From 1939 to 1942, employers narrowed wage differentials within this sector by granting the lower-skilled welders, smiths, and others wage gains of about 38 percent (from a low of Cr\$1.27 and a high of Cr\$3.20 per hour to Cr\$1.75 and Cr\$4.44), while skilled machinists and mechanics had quite modest wage increases of about 11 percent (Cr\$1.60 and Cr\$4.80 to Cr\$1.77 and Cr\$5.30). Increases during 1943 and 1944 averaged 10 percent for São Paulo's metalworkers.³⁶ Still, their wages ranked them in the top 15 percent of income for industrial workers in the city, and most factory workers not only earned less than the metalúrgicos at this time, they also suffered a severe decrease in wages in 1940, and only returned to 1939's wages in 1943. All factory workers experienced steady decreases in their real income throughout this period (table 4.2).

Many textile workers earned among the lowest wages for industrial employment in the city. Even though textile workers received nominal increases during this period (from an average of Cr\$1.06 per hour in 1939 to about Cr\$1.31 in 1942), their real wage rates declined during the war.³⁷ Foremen used their power during the dictatorship to ar-

bitrarily reduce workers' important piece rate by finding perfect-quality cloth "flawed." When foremen chose not to exercise such control, weavers could earn wages equivalent to skilled metalworkers, but they did this through strenuous effort and long hours standing at their looms. Such work regimes led to high accident rates in the factories; in 1941, for example, São Paulo's mills reported an accident rate of 25,315 incidents per 100,000 workers. This was fifty-five times the rate suffered in Great Britain.³⁸ Those who produced at high levels also had to face criticism from the other weavers who sought to limit output in order to maintain some control over their work.³⁹

The low average wages in the textile sector reflect the large number of women workers in the mills. Even when women gained access to traditional men's work in textiles (e.g., machinist positions in the mills), metallurgy, and other industrial establishments during the war, they continued to earn wages below those of their male counterparts. That is, regulations that forced employers to continue to pay 50 percent of workers' wages after they had been drafted (as a bonus for those who served in the armed forces) operated as an incentive for industrialists to hire women, who could not be drafted, instead of men. From 1939 to 1943, the number of women factory workers in the state of São Paulo rose from 86,745 to 213,586, and the percentage of industrial laborers who were women increased from 32.8 to 42.1 percent; this replacement of men by women increased in 1944 and 1945.⁴⁰ Even though women replaced men in many factory jobs, bosses continued to see women as auxiliary workers who were merely contributing to overall family income. Industrialists did not believe women workers needed a livable wage.⁴¹

These jobs were temporary, however, and women were systematically denied access to the new industrial training programs being set up by the SENAI (Serviço Nacional de Aprendizagem Industrial). Mary Cannon of the U.S. Women's Bureau noted that "the [apprenticeship] program is geared chiefly to boys, though theoretically there are opportunities for girls." Employers encouraged women workers to be ladylike at all times, Cannon explained, and "a bonus was given to a number of women [in one São Paulo city textile mill] each month for neatness and cleanliness." She added that employers maintained a structure that systematically discriminated against women workers not only by denying them advanced training but also by deliberately keeping them in the lowest-paying jobs, denying child care facilities, and having a "tendency to 'protect' women in industry with maternity

and health regulations to their economic disadvantage." At the same time, these women were paid roughly 70 percent of what men received.⁴² Federal regulations prohibited this practice, and many cases went to the labor courts, but no general ruling by the courts halted it. Such discrimination gravely affected the many single mothers who filled the city's factories at this time. After studying conditions in thirteen textile mills in São Paulo and Rio, Cannon sadly concluded: "There is no doubt that the large majority of women in industry work for the necessities of living—not the extras nor for economic independence. They help support the family, or are the sole wage-earners for themselves and their children. In the cotton mills especially, there was an air of indifference, of apathy; in most of these mills women and girls at the machines were poorly dressed, often barefooted."⁴³

The 1936 minimum wage decree set forth a base income that was supposed to meet the necessities of food, housing, clothing, hygiene, and transportation for an individual worker (this was not a "family wage"). It also made this base equal for men and women workers. When the government finally established the first minimum wage rates in May 1940, however, it included a provision allowing employers to lower women's wages by 10 percent, which some mill owners did, supposedly to pay for nurseries and other facilities in factories. Although the Ministry of Labor closed this loophole in 1943, the minimum wage became women's wages in industry. This minimum, which was calculated by month, was Cr\$220.00 for the city of São Paulo (rates varied by location according to the cost of living) in May 1940, in 1939, the average monthly income for textile workers was Cr\$215.70, and metalworkers averaged about Cr\$326.00. The government increased the minimum wage in January 1943 to Cr\$275.00, and in May 1943 to Cr\$285.00, but it continued to be a base for unskilled labor in general and semiskilled women factory workers in particular.⁴⁴ Indeed, the government did not increase the minimum wage again until January 1951. Some bosses augmented the minimum with bonuses, but these were not permanent and so did not affect the base rate used for calculating future increases.⁴⁵ Accordingly, the real minimum wage rate fell steadily in those years (table 4-2). For most workers in São Paulo, then, the only significant earnings increases during the Estado Novo came from working increased hours in the factories.

São Paulo's *pelegos* rarely spoke out for higher wages during the Estado Novo. The Textile Workers' Union did try to play a broker's role

by privately asking Vargas for slight increases in the January 1943 minimum wage, but the directorate never attempted to mobilize its membership to push for a higher rate. Although the Metalworkers' Union discussed the rising cost of living, it actually praised the Ministry of Labor for protecting workers' earning power during the war.⁴⁶ It is perhaps appropriate that during the Estado Novo the only individuals who admitted that São Paulo's industrial workers needed higher wages were the industrialists themselves. A 1942 study of its members by the FIESP showed that 89.3 percent of those surveyed believed wages should be raised, 4.9 percent opposed increases, and 5.8 percent had no opinion.⁴⁷ It was one thing to admit that your workers needed wage increases, however, and quite another to actually grant them; these capitalists rarely increased their workers' wages. One FIESP member summed up the industrialists' denial of responsibility for their workers' predicament when he said: "I cannot understand how part of the working class can eat with the salaries they now receive. However, the increase of salaries will not resolve the situation, because, as it allows the worker to buy more food, that does not exist [in the markets], it brings an increase in prices of available goods through an increase in demand. The statistics are proving that."⁴⁸ In May 1945, FIESP president Roberto Simonsen told his colleagues that the city's workers needed immediate and significant wage increases. Simonsen understood well the problems created by the "savage capitalism" of the Estado Novo. By extracting a huge surplus from their workers with the use of the state's control over the labor market, industrialists risked destroying that labor market. Workers who did not have enough to eat certainly could not perform the rigorous duties of factory labor.⁴⁹

With food prices climbing steadily, the city's industrialists frequently discussed workers' problems feeding themselves and their families. These industrialists knew that increases in the prices of beans, potatoes, and other basic foods had a greater impact on workers' lives than other price rises. One FIESP study showed that the average factory laborer had to work two hours just to earn enough money to pay for her or his lunch. The dangers of the lead-contaminated milk sold to workers became a public scandal in 1945.⁵⁰

The city's industrialists had been discussing these problems since 1941, when they decided to install restaurants and food stores in their factories. They also pressured the state and federal governments to find a way to lower food costs, but prices in working-class areas continued

Table 4.3 Cost-of-Living Indexes for São Paulo, 1939-1945 (1939 = 100)

Year	Total ^a	Food	Housing	Clothing	Transportation
1939	100	100	100	100	100
1940	107	107	110	106	100
1941	119	121	114	122	100
1942	132	134	116	143	100
1943	153	153	126	183	100
1944	210	201	220	233	107
1945	259	245	270	300	115

Source: Seiti Kaneko Endo and Heron Carlos Esvael do Carmo, *Bravo Histórico do Índice de Preços ao Consumidor no Município de São Paulo* (São Paulo: FIEP, 1985), 17-20.

^aThe total cost-of-living index was composed of thirteen areas of expenditures. The expenditures listed had the following values within the total market basket: food, 54.12%, housing, 15.33%, clothing, 10.56%, and transportation, 1.86%.

to rise (table 4.3),⁵¹ and the city's industrialists feared the workers would rebel against these deteriorating conditions. They discussed this problem in the media and at most of their meetings during 1944 and 1945.⁵² Workers, of course, talked about these price increases among themselves and sometimes complained to President Vargas about the difficulties of living on their meager wages.⁵³ Food prices rose so rapidly in 1944 and 1945 that even São Paulo's pelegos began to speak out against the increases. In November 1944, several of these union bosses wrote to Vargas to explain that they would not be able to control the city's industrial workers if food prices continued to rise.⁵⁴

The physical makeup of São Paulo changed a great deal during the war, and this also affected industrial workers' lives. As the city grew, developers demolished several important working-class areas to build middle-class and luxury housing and new office complexes. This forced even more workers into basements and cortiços (tenements). Other workers had to move to the outskirts of the city, where they lived in small houses. Valêncio de Barros, who studied workers' living conditions, noted that the average worker lived in "a narrow and dark house, squeezed between neighbors, with one or two windows toward the street, filled with noise, dust, and noxious gases."⁵⁵

FIEP members discussed the problems caused by this growth and in 1942 secured low-interest loans through the federal government for the

construction of workers' housing. The Federation of Industries estimated that ten thousand new units were needed for their workers, but construction of that many houses during the war was impossible. According to the U.S. consul: "The working man's housing problem, in view of the general shortage and very high prices of construction materials, seems to be insoluble at present or before the end of the war . . . brings back to normal level the cost of land."⁵⁶

These changes in housing patterns exacerbated transportation problems for the city's workers. About 900,000 Paulistanos commuted by public transportation (600,000 by trolley and 300,000 by bus) during the war years. Shortages of fuel and spare parts for the vehicles kept over one-third of the buses and many of the trolleys idle. Although public transportation remained inexpensive, it became so unreliable that textile industrialists began providing buses for some workers. According to one mill owner: "There are thousands of working men living in the suburbs who . . . must get up in the early morning hours and travel often for hours in crowded, slow, and dirty vehicles."⁵⁷ A popular samba from 1941 illustrates how transportation problems compounded the misery caused by the almost limitless power of bosses during the Estado Novo. The samba recounts an employee's pleading with his foreman after being fired for lateness:

Boss, the train was late . . .
 That's why I'm getting here now
 Here is the Central's certificate
 The train was half an hour late
 You have no right
 To dismiss me!
 You must have patience
 You must understand
 I've always been obedient
 One delay is justified
 If there is reason
 I'm the head of a family
 I need the bread
 Don't say no.⁵⁸

These problems brought on by the Estado Novo, the war, and the industrial expansion in São Paulo had a clear and negative impact on the lives of the city's workers, and they seem to have affected women

workers more severely than men. During the war, their homework as seamstresses increased, and the daily struggle to shelter, feed, and clothe their families forced many women weavers to take on extra work. Single mothers who worked in the mills often lived in cortiços or basements, both near the textile factories of Brás and Mooca as well as in outlying areas. Families commonly had to sleep, cook, and eat in one or two rooms, and bathing facilities were more than likely communal. One social worker in the city remarked that the inhabitants of these quarters "lead the life of animals and, at the same time, struggle in our industries, where their work is profitable [for the industrialists]."⁵⁹ Many single mothers worked unbearably long hours and then returned to the cortiços and basements to feed their waiting children: "It's common to see, near the factory exits, women workers with containers [*marmittas*], [buying their children's dinner] in unscrupulous establishments, that make food without any nutritional value. The question that time and again I asked, had the following answer: 'I don't have time to prepare food, so every day I buy it made', and so thousands of workers and children pass the years eating and sleeping poorly in basements."⁶⁰ Those who escaped the dangers of these living conditions moved to the city's outlying areas, even though getting to and from the mills from there might entail leaving home at 4:00 or 5:00 in the morning, walking several miles to the suburban train stations, and arriving home around 10:00 at night.

The shortages of food most directly preoccupied women, who had the primary responsibility for feeding their families. One foreign observer noted in March 1944 that "the endless queues which one sees day after day in front of butcher shops, milk distribution depots, etc., etc., are a source of constant irritation. Housewives and servants spend hours daily standing in line, and criticism of President Vargas and the Government is so widespread that it is affecting his popularity with the masses."⁶¹ The war also brought important changes in the system of food distribution. The public markets still operated, but chain grocery and drug stores captured an increasing portion of retail sales. While these chains sometimes charged lower prices, they also made the lives of women factory workers more difficult. Chain stores did not provide credit, which severely hampered the buying power of working-class families that traditionally depended on such arrangements. One social worker in São Paulo noted that mothers who worked in the mills had to rely on women neighbors who did not work outside the home to care for their children and do much of their shopping on accounts.⁶²

Worker Survival and Resistance during the Estado Novo

Workers' Appeals to the "Father of the Poor"

From the time they first entered São Paulo's factories in the late nineteenth century, and through the mid-1930s, the city's industrial workers employed a wide variety of survival and resistance strategies to ameliorate the harsh conditions they faced. As I discussed earlier, the Estado Novo effectively destroyed the fledgling independent union movement in São Paulo, then, Brazil's entry into the war furthered the authoritarian atmosphere of the industrial relations system. Without access to independent unions, the city's workers had to rely on other tools of survival and resistance.⁶³ Within the world of their own culture, workers continued to write and sing protest sambas. And when frustration with life in São Paulo reached a fever pitch, workers rioted. In early February 1945, after changes in trolley schedules caused many to arrive late at work and at home, for example, hundreds of workers smashed and burned all the trolleys they could find in the Largo Sete de Setembro.⁶⁴ And finally, as they had since the first days of industrialization, workers simply left the city for the rural sector when they found the conditions in the factories intolerable.⁶⁵

The Estado Novo and the war created several new tools for workers in their survival struggles. Women wrote directly to Vargas seeking aid for their families. Enedina Cesar de Oliveira Fernandes of the Barra Funda neighborhood wrote explaining that she had to work in the factory in order to support her children because her husband could not provide a steady income. Like many women who wrote, she specifically invoked Vargas's standing as "the protector of the poor" and requested that the federal government help her send a few of her six children to private school. Working women knew that the only way their children could avoid the mills was through such an education. Paula Martins Galvão, a single mother who lived in Bela Vista section of the city, asked Vargas to help her send the eldest of her four children to school. This, she told the dictator, was the only way to pull her family out of poverty.⁶⁶ In fact, women wrote the vast majority of the petitions for help with children's education.⁶⁷ Women workers also wrote seeking protection for their neighborhoods in the face of the great upheaval of the Estado Novo and war years. Some sought paved roads or restrictions on night work, and others denounced greedy landlords.⁶⁸

These petitions demonstrate the complex interplay between official rhetoric and those at whom it was aimed. This is clear in the letter workers in the Bosque da Saude neighborhood wrote, complaining to Vargas that São Paulo's development was leaving them behind:

The majority of the population of our neighborhood has few resources, Mr. President, but we are a hardworking people with the ability to earn our daily bread [and] we deserve the minimum comfort of a paved road in order to get to work.

In return for the loyalty of Brazilian workers, we now have a Government that has for ten years defended and worked for those workers [And while downtown development has come at the expense of the working-class areas] we don't want in any way to criticize any act of our Mayor for this! We are simply expressing our point of view. We believe in "dynamism" and "results," only we would now like to see a little more equal distribution, for example also in our neighborhood. We hope Your Excellency will recognize the justice of our requests.⁶⁹

Like others who wrote to Vargas, these residents geared their appeal to Vargas's rhetoric. They implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) offered their support to the dictator in exchange for his intervention on their behalf. Workers' children also learned to petition Vargas for help. Their teachers and parents helped them put their letters into a form that would appeal to the "father of the poor." Maria Yolanda Pugliesi of the Cambuci neighborhood, no doubt with the help of her teacher, wrote a revealing letter to the president worth quoting at length:

I would like to present myself. I am a girl of eleven years and a Brazilian, thank God. I am in the fourth level in the Campos Sales school.

At the end of this year, God willing, I will finish the primary course. Last Wednesday, my teacher asked me if I wanted to continue my studies. "Naturally, yes, Dona Josefina," was my answer. She then asked me what I would want to do [with my education]. I answered I very much wanted to be a teacher, in order to teach other little girls and boys, and because I once overheard my father say that a great number of Brazilian children grow up illiterate. I think it's very bad that a girl or a boy would not know how to read or write.

[Because my parents cannot afford my schooling] . . . Dona Josefina told me I should write a little letter to Dr. Getúlio Vargas, who is

considered the father of all the children of Brazil, telling him what is happening with me and asking for his support.

That is why I am writing these lines to you. Certainly, I will not be disappointed, isn't that right Senhor Getúlio? I want to be a teacher and I think that, yes, you will help me with my studies . . . [and] you will not only help me, but all of Brazil in this way. You will profit because you will have one more assistant in the fight against illiteracy. . . . Father and Mother will be very thankful, and so will I, and this way your government will have even more support.⁷⁰

Vargas responded to these letters by ordering local authorities to investigate, and many worthy petitioners received some level of financial assistance.⁷¹ The impact of this interplay was significant. Workers found an important resource in the president's rhetoric, and Vargas began to accumulate goodwill among Brazil's working class.⁷² While such assistance reached only a handful of workers, everyone in a given neighborhood or factory heard of a neighbor's or friend's good fortune.⁷³

Women workers also complained to Vargas about the police in São Paulo. Wanda Matuleonina told Vargas she was being harassed by a man in her neighborhood, but that the police would not look into this for her. Maria Rodrigues told the president that the police were harassing her. Again, these and other letters appealed to Vargas as the champion of the working class. Further, the women understood well that Vargas sought to limit the power of local institutions in his drive to integrate Brazil. They had also heard Vargas's and Minister of Labor Marcondes Filho's frequent appeals for working-class support for the war effort and their promises of an open and just society after the war. So São Paulo's workers used these letters to push the dictator to fulfill his promises of increased social justice for all Brazilians, especially since the official corporatist structure was doing so little to improve their lives.⁷⁴

Women textile workers did not limit their protests to family and neighborhood issues. They used a variety of resources to limit the increasing exploitation forced on them by mill owners and foremen. Sometimes they operated within the official industrial relations structure and filed processos against foremen's fines or for some benefits offered by the state, but the vast majority of these women workers were not members of the Textile Workers' Union.⁷⁵ Accordingly, the most

common form of resistance to the worsening life in the mills was absenteeism. Even though mill owners and the government developed harsh punishments for absent textile workers, weavers simply stayed away from the factories when they needed a break. These women also violated the wartime ban on changing jobs, which they likened to a form of slavery, and fled from low pay when they could. Rather than attempt to discipline the thousands of weavers who regularly stayed away from work or changed jobs, most textile firms offered a system of bonuses over the prevailing wage rate to workers who maintained good attendance records. Weavers used their presence in or absence from the mills as a tool for increasing their earnings.⁷⁶

Workers who stayed in dangerous or demeaning work environments for the high wages often turned to the "father of the poor" for assistance. Workers who did not want to join the union often appealed directly to Vargas for help with bureaucratic matters.⁷⁷ A group of fourteen women glassworkers at the Campanhia Vidraria Santa Marina, for example, protested against their low pay by writing to the president. They told him that most of them were single mothers or women whose husbands were physically unable to work. So, these women reasoned, they should receive the same wages men in their factory earned.⁷⁸ Durvalina Camargo, who lived in the Lapa area, did not work outside the home, but she wrote to Vargas complaining that textile shops and the state Department of Labor were conspiring to limit the protections the president had promised to the working class. She described the sweatshops where young women she knew worked long hours at miserable wages and begged Vargas, as the protector of all workers, to intervene to guarantee that the labor laws be upheld. She further complained that state investigators were paid by industrialists to ignore code violations.⁷⁹ Durvalina Camargo knew exactly how to pique Vargas's interest. The president's concerns about Paulista elites dated back to the 1930s, and beginning with the 1932 civil war workers learned to play local industrialists and the federal government against each other.⁸⁰

These women displayed great courage in writing their letters. They appealed directly to the president of Brazil and openly denounced powerful men, from their bosses to city and state officials. And of these women, none showed more courage than Júlia Antônia Walhiamos, a young worker in a sock factory. In early 1943 she wrote to Vargas about the sexual harassment she suffered from her foreman. She told the president that her boss often directed to her "improper proposals [that

were] inconceivable for a poor girl, who is in fact honorable and moral." She added that he had threatened her job. Júlia Antônia continued: "[My boss said] I would stay in the job, if I satisfied his sexual desires just once." He also threatened to transfer her to a part of the factory where only men worked, "in jobs not fitting for a woman."⁸¹ When she refused her foreman, he lowered her wages (Júlia Antônia sent copies of her pay envelopes to Vargas as proof of this), and then he fired her.

She first went to the state Department of Labor, but its inspectors took the word of her boss at face value. She managed to get her job back, but at the reduced rate. Moreover, she still had to work with the foreman who had harassed her and then demonstrated the full extent of his power over her. She wrote to Vargas to get some of the protection that he had promised his government would provide to workers. The president responded by ordering an investigation. Unfortunately, it was conducted by the state Department of Labor. The inspectors found that her wages did, in fact, drop from Cr\$425.10 in March 1942 to Cr\$301.40 in April 1942, but they found no substantive evidence that this was done as punishment by her foreman. That is, the investigators from the state Department of Labor, who were, of course, men who had regular interactions with factory owners and foremen, believed the foreman and decided that Júlia Antônia was lying. They did not, however, manage to explain why her wages dropped so dramatically (27 percent) in one month. The government did decide to pay her the cost (Cr\$98.20, or about one-third of her new monthly wage) of filing an official processo against her foreman. Although she lost, Júlia Antônia's case demonstrates the lengths to which some women workers in São Paulo went to use the federal government and Vargas's rhetoric to press for social justice. Many weavers experienced sexual harassment, and the dictator's rhetoric became one more potential resource for their struggles to limit the power of foremen.

At first glance, these letters to Vargas seem to point to the atomization of São Paulo's working class: unable to go to their co-opted unions for relief, workers took matters into their own hands, one situation at a time. Such was not really the case, though. While individuals sought assistance and attempted to manipulate the Estado Novo through direct appeals to the president, women continued to organize in informal groups, many of which became clandestine factory commissions in the mills. Women felt at ease discussing sexual harassment, problems making ends meet, and other issue with their companheiras, but these

were not issues they wanted to bring before the male-dominated unions. If a nursery had been installed, for example, women would meet there, where they could talk without the interference of men. Often, older women (some only in their late twenties were considered veterans) used the protection afforded by their seniority, as well as their longer experience in dealing with foremen, to put together these *comissões*.⁸² In early June 1944, such groups organized a very effective consumer strike; they distributed handbills and advised workers to boycott certain stores.⁸³

Further, workers' letters to Vargas clearly demonstrate that neither their rural origins nor the propaganda of the Estado Novo had obscured the consciousness of these workers.⁸⁴ When Odette Pasquini discussed Vargas and his "populist appeal," she noted that the president's policies more often than not helped industrialists, not working people: "Vargas, oh he was the 'father of the poor,' as they used to say on the radio, but of course he was truly the mother of the rich!"⁸⁵ Her comment is a perceptive one, and it demonstrates that workers did not simply accept what Vargas and his propaganda machine said about the government and its programs. The harsh realities of their lives were constant reminders that conditions had not measurably improved during the Estado Novo.

That is not to say that all Brazilian workers saw the situation perfectly clearly. Many no doubt truly believed that Vargas had their best interests in mind. Antônio Gonçalves de Andrade, who had been fired from his job as a metalworker in 1922, petitioned Vargas twenty years later for help getting his old position back.⁸⁶ Antônio Rizzo of Mooca wrote to Vargas in 1943 asking the dictator's permission to become a street vendor. An industrial accident prohibited him from heavy work, so even though selling popcorn on the street was not the sort of work Vargas spoke about men doing, he told the dictator he had to do it: "I am a man and I am ashamed of not working."⁸⁷ No one in the federal or state government could determine exactly why Rizzo had written to Vargas, for he asked for nothing from him. Rizzo, it seems, only wanted to explain why he was not living up to Vargas's expectations of "manhood," as defined by work.

The prevalence of factory commissions among workers in São Paulo's larger industrial establishments helps explain why a weaver like Odette Pasquini had such a clear view of Vargas while men such as Antônio Gonçalves de Andrade and Antônio Rizzo had more faith in Vargas's desire and ability to improve their lives. The commissions

provided an important social space to articulate critiques of the industrial relations system. Older experienced workers used this social space to pass their historical memory along to new arrivals in the factories. The commissions also served as informal institutions for disciplining workers who wanted to participate in the government's industrial relations system or foremen's production speedups. So, popular opposition to the pelegos and the Estado Novo's harsh conditions did not by themselves encourage Paulistano factory workers to maintain their own independent organizations; it was the factory commissions' own internal politics that kept workers out of the sindicatos. It is important to note that at times commission members could be quite coercive. Just because all the people in a given *comissão* worked in the same section of a factory, they did not necessarily share the same perspectives on wage demands, relations with foremen, when to strike, and other issues.⁸⁸ But participation in a commission did lead its members to articulate collective positions regarding their bosses, the state, the sindicatos, and so forth. In the final analysis, then, São Paulo's legacy of independent rank-and-file factory-level organizing, along with the shared experience of increasing misery among factory workers during the Estado Novo, explains why so many of the city's industrial workers approached Vargas so skeptically at this time.⁸⁹

Vargas responded to workers' independent organizing and letters by decreeing several wage increases and bonus schemes. In early 1942, the federal government instituted a 10 percent bonus for all textile workers. The Textile Workers' Union had not lobbied for these increases—individual weavers did with their letters to Vargas.⁹⁰ During 1943 the federal government and employers responded to workers' petitions and organizing by freezing some food prices, providing bonuses for workers supporting large families (the *abono familiar*), and twice raising the minimum wage. Thus, industrialists did increase workers' take-home pay at this time, but these hikes did not keep pace with inflation.⁹¹

Resistance by metalworkers likewise came to Vargas's attention. Like the weavers, they wrote directly to the president. Interestingly, metalworkers' letters were most often concerned with work issues and with how foremen's and employers' interference in shop-floor activities affected their lives in the factories. Male metalworkers sometimes petitioned Vargas for help with the rapidly increasing cost of living, but more often they relied on women to deal with such issues.⁹² In most of their complaints about work, these metalworkers accused the state government of siding with the industrialists. They pointed out that the

state Department of Labor was deliberately blocking the implementation of the dictator's labor code. This, the metalworkers reminded Vargas, kept a wedge between him and the majority of working people in São Paulo. As Antônio de Carvalho stated: "The Department of Labor of the state of São Paulo continues as only a formality, and is completely outside the program [of labor laws] for which it was created, and so it still follows the traditional system of the Old Republic. That is, it is completely at odds with . . . the wishes of Dr. Getúlio Vargas with regard to the employers and workers of São Paulo. . . . The Department of Labor of the state of São Paulo [does little] to defend your laws because the capitalists in São Paulo continue to control everything."⁹³ Other workers wrote of the high profits industrialists were taking at the expense of the city's workers, while still others complained about the dangerous work conditions created by greedy employers who opposed the president's labor laws.⁹⁴ Antônio Urbano, who was in the midst of a dispute with General Motors do Brasil, went so far as to tell Vargas he felt "humiliated" by his employer's treatment. This, he asserted, was not the way workers were supposed to be treated under Vargas's rule.⁹⁵

Some metalúrgicos took this strategy one step further by specifically denouncing individual foremen and employers as Axis sympathizers and/or opponents of Vargas. Hundreds of workers, individually and in groups, used this device to harass their foremen during the war, but the denunciations by São Paulo's metalworkers seem to have caused the most extensive investigations by the DOPS and other government agencies.⁹⁶ When, for example, twenty workers at Cia Brasileira de Mineração e Metalúrgica in São Caetano (an industrial suburb of the city) wrote to Vargas complaining that the management of their firm ignored the labor code and harbored pro-Axis sympathies, the federal government immediately investigated. During the investigation, several metalworkers denounced the furnace foreman as an opponent of Vargas and a supporter of Italy. After several long visits to the factory, federal investigators determined that neither the foreman nor management was pro-Axis; indeed, they concluded the workers specifically denounced certain bosses because they had implemented speedups of the work regime. They also found that with the establishment operating twenty-four hours per day, workers slept during their breaks and seemed to live in the factory. The firm's management explained that they needed to maintain high production levels and promised the investigators they would improve work conditions soon.⁹⁷

Other denunciations also singled out foremen who had recently intensified work regimes. Workers in a shop at São Paulo Light, which made and ran the trolleys, complained that their foreman's actions "lowered national morale and reduced [workers] to humiliating and dangerous conditions." They appealed to Vargas as nationalists who supported the Estado Novo and Brazil's participation in the war.⁹⁸ These denunciations were a powerful tool of resistance for São Paulo's metalworkers, for they brought investigations not only of the political orientation of bosses, but also of conditions in the factories. Several such denunciations even led to the imprisonment of foremen.⁹⁹ Ultimately, then, these workers learned to use the repressive tools of the regime to their advantage; they punished bosses for harsh work regimes by turning the authoritarian nature of the Estado Novo back on them.

Collective Resistance: Workers Organize Themselves

Women textile workers used factory commissions to coordinate their various survival and resistance strategies. São Paulo's metalworkers, who trusted neither Vargas nor their co-opted union, also organized independent comissões to press for higher wages and safer work conditions. Metalúrgicos met outside their factories at lunch to put together commissions and develop ties between groups from various shops. Conrado de Papa recalled, "Vargas arrived [in São Paulo] on May Day as our 'father,' but he was just working for the rich," so Papa and his colleagues organized. Hermento Mendes Dantas supported the independent comissão because it was the "first line of defense on the shop floor."¹⁰⁰ Only independent organizing provided a viable means for fighting the increasingly harsh work routines. Antônio Lombardi and Geraldo Pascolato recalled that several companheiros who worked as mechanics at Máquinas Piratininga would walk about the shop floor fixing equipment and talking about the commissions. They and others who belonged to the union, such as Francisco da Silva, supported the independent organizing but did not openly work with the organizers out of fear of the DOPS.¹⁰¹

The city's metalworkers had been organizing independently since the late 1910s. Paulistano metalworkers crafted and maintained a fairly representative and radical union in the 1920s and early 1930s because they did not experience the same divisions between their leadership cadre and the rank and file that the city's women textile workers had to endure. Accordingly, they did not rely as exclusively on an informal

factory commission structure as did women factory workers. The *pelegos'* control of the Metalworkers' Union during the *Estado Novo*, however, encouraged them to develop such local, independent groupings. São Paulo metalworkers began to organize such factory commissions in larger factories (e.g., *Sofunge*, *Máquinas Piratininga*, *Aços Finos*, and others), and workers in smaller establishments organized within their shops' neighborhoods. These metalworkers chose to organize commissions not only because *metalúrgicos* had done so in the past, but also because they had seen and heard of the success of the women's *comissões*, especially those in textile mills. Many Paulistano metalworkers had started off in the textile sector or had wives, sisters, mothers, or other kin working in the mills. Male metalworkers decided to rely on factory commissions during the *Estado Novo* in part because they had learned of the *comissões'* importance through both direct experience in the mills and through kinship ties to female textile workers.¹⁰²

Metalworkers' *comissões* tried to improve conditions on the shop floor by denouncing foremen and organizing slowdowns in which several key plant sections limited overall production.¹⁰³ When this failed, *metalúrgicos* turned to sabotage. Rather than breaking machinery, these skilled workers cleverly altered their products so that they would not function properly. Metalworkers used inferior or improper materials and passed nonworking parts and machines through the quality control sections. Waldemar Clemente's factory came to a standstill after a large number of the electric motors produced there were found to be defective because workers had substituted colored iron for the copper needed to maintain electrical conductivity. Clemente admitted that his workers could not survive on the meager wages they earned, but he offered them inexpensive foodstuffs as a solution rather than paying them more, the sabotage continued.¹⁰⁴ Industrialists in the city were obviously quite troubled by this, and the FIESP worked closely with the São Paulo secretary of public security and Department of Labor to combat it. They even installed a direct telephone line so owners could register acts of sabotage in the factories and call in DOPS officials to investigate. When they could determine who had performed the sabotage, the industrialists had the guilty workers jailed.¹⁰⁵

While the DOPS furnished the immediate response to sabotage in the metallurgy industry, the Federation of Industries and the government also created a long-term strategy of supplying highly skilled workers who would not commit such acts. During the war they created

the SENAI to train workers for the skilled trades and to indoctrinate them into being "conscientious" and "loyal" in the factories. The SENAI's purpose was to provide desperately needed workers who would use their skills according to industrialists' orders.¹⁰⁶

An Experiment with "Populism"

Throughout the early 1940s, Getúlio Vargas and his closest advisers discussed their prospects for continued rule. Brazil's participation in the war against fascism in Europe, along with the regime's rhetoric about democracy and citizenship, had heightened expectations of a turn to open politics soon after the war. In 1942 and 1943, Vargas and Minister of Labor Marcondes Filho struggled to find ways to use the *Estado Novo's* union structure as the basis for a postdictatorship political party. They quickly realized, however, that the elaborate corporatist structure was an empty façade throughout most of Brazil and would be of limited help in mobilizing political support. Ministry of Labor research in the late 1930s revealed that there were more unionized workers in the Federal District alone than in the rest of Brazil, including the industrial heartland of São Paulo. And over 90 percent of the unionized workers throughout Brazil were men.¹⁰⁷

As they considered their options for operating within a democratic framework, Vargas and Marcondes Filho moved to bolster the *sindicatos*. Their first step was to admit that the existing union structure was an empty shell without large-scale popular participation. Their next move was to lure workers into the state-run *sindicatos* by offering thorough benefits and improved work conditions.¹⁰⁸ Vargas attempted to accomplish this by finally creating bureaucratic institutions within the Ministry of Labor to encourage unionization and the extension of social benefits. These measures had a limited immediate impact, for the new labor bureaucrats needed time to reach rank-and-file workers; these new activists within the Ministry of Labor in Rio also recognized that the existing union leaders were an impediment to this unionization campaign. The Ministry of Labor hoped to bring workers into the *sindicatos* by training the government unionists to be more effective leaders and by expelling some of the *pelegos*. The government in Rio even convinced the National Confederation of Industries to instruct its members to hire unionized workers before those who were not *sindicalizados*.¹⁰⁹

Vargas initiated a full-fledged "unionization campaign" in April

1943, and then released a comprehensive labor code (Consolidação das Leis do Trabalho, CLT) in May 1943 as a symbol of his commitment to the consolidation of the many types of protection he had promised the working class.¹¹⁰ The Ministry of Labor encouraged pelegos to bring in as many new members as possible. Vargas's efforts to increase union membership were initially opposed by the pelegos, who had a vested interest in maintaining small, unrepresentative unions. Their opposition eventually forced Vargas to offer them cash rewards for increases in their membership. With such an incentive the Textile Workers' and Metalworkers' unions of São Paulo achieved modest gains in membership.¹¹¹

In general, though, these changes within the labor bureaucracy had little impact in São Paulo. There were no major changes in the leadership of the textile and metallurgical workers' unions, and the state Department of Labor continued to run the industrial relations system.¹¹² But the rank and file in São Paulo responded to the rhetoric of a more open industrial relations system by initiating several modest strike movements. Beginning in early 1944, metalworkers pushed for higher wages; in May glassworkers struck, in September street cleaners walked out, and finally, in late 1944 and early 1945, textile workers' factory commissions demanded wage hikes and shorter hours. All these strikers received some portion of their demands through direct bargaining with employers, as both bosses and strikers ignored the elaborate industrial relations system of the Estado Novo.¹¹³

As the war came to an end, the political space created by Vargas grew. Editorial writers in São Paulo began to openly challenge the Estado Novo and the high profits industrialists extracted from the city's workers. They even linked such practices to the Integralists, and thus to fascism. These practices would end only with the opening of politics to São Paulo.¹¹⁴ Then, Brazil's representatives at the Inter-American Conference at Chapultepec, Mexico, publicly supported workers' right to strike. They admitted that this ran counter to the ideology of the Estado Novo but proclaimed that times had changed. With the end of the war in Europe, Paulistanos spoke out for freedom for all and the right to strike.¹¹⁵

Throughout 1945 Vargas continued to woo São Paulo's workers by limiting and then relaxing Ministry of Labor control over the unions. Such a tilt toward workers entailed more than simply loosening corporatist control of the unions; it also required changing the balance of

power in the tripartite labor courts.¹¹⁶ In the past, Ministry of Labor representatives on the court almost always sided with industry representatives in ruling against workers' processes. Vargas had great leeway in appointments to the labor courts, however, and could influence the behavior of the ministry's attorneys (procuradores da justiça do trabalho). Accordingly, the labor courts supported a higher percentage of workers' claims in 1945 than in any previous year. Indeed, several unionists who served on São Paulo's Regional Labor Tribunal confirmed that the ministry's representatives have traditionally been swayed by national political considerations.¹¹⁷

São Paulo's battered Communist party took advantage of the political openness and quickly created the United Workers' Movement (Movimento Unificador dos Trabalhadores, MUT) in April 1945 to act as an alternative to the co-opted unions. After a decade of intense repression, the Communist party had emerged as a new organization made up of young militants who concentrated their efforts on organizing workers rather than planning a quixotic revolutionary putsch.¹¹⁸ Luís Firmino de Lima, a weaver who joined the *partidão* in 1944, recalled, "We young guys weren't concerned with party issues, we were more interested in union matters."¹¹⁹ These young militants had a lot of work to do with the comissões and other workers' groups to gain their support in 1945, because the Communist party had been backing the Vargas regime (as part of the "Popular Front") and had maintained a "no strike" pledge during the war. Luís Firmino and his colleagues had a difficult time convincing textile workers to follow the MUT, which observed the PCB line of supporting Vargas and opposing strikes. The MUT even launched an antistrike push called the "Tighten Your Belt" campaign. João Amazonas, the MUT's president, appropriated the regime's and industrialists' rhetoric when he discussed the rank and file's strikes, claiming that some of them "were incited by *agentes probocadores*."¹²⁰ The MUT and other progressive groups did, however, organize some protests on May Day. While the pelegos, federal and state government officials, and representatives of industry gathered at the Municipal Theater to praise the Estado Novo's industrial relations system, opposition groups gathered at the Rua do Carmo off the Praça da Sé to call for freedom of the press, open elections, amnesty for political prisoners, and the right to strike.¹²¹

Industrial workers closely followed these and other developments, and several comissões organized successful sitdown strikes. Then, on 12 May 1945, again through their factory commissions, weavers at

Crespi struck for higher wages and improved work conditions. Workers in mill after mill throughout the city followed this lead. Soon, strikes paralyzed the textile industry. The city's glassworkers followed, and then the metalúrgicos.¹²² At first, industrialists attempted to stand firm by having strikers arrested. Women, who operated through their own factory commissions, were beaten by police on picket lines and arrested.¹²³ In one week alone, workers at 365 firms in the city struck. The Paulistano bourgeoisie feared these strikes would evolve into a sort of class war. Many of the city's large wholesalers even took out riot insurance policies in May and June. Faced with such popular effervescence, the industrialists moved to defuse the independent organizing and bargained directly with the pelegos.¹²⁴

The pelegos quickly recognized their tenuous position and moved to take control of the strike movement from the factory commissions. Officials from the Textile Workers' Union met with industrialists and signed an accord based on the increases bargained for by some of the city's comissões. Industrialists and the unionists met along with inventor Fernando Costa at the Palácio dos Campos Elíseos to sign the accord and praise each other for the high spirit of cooperation.¹²⁵ With more than ten thousand of the city's metalworkers out and the labor courts jammed with potential wage settlements, many industrialists in this sector negotiated directly with factory commissions. Pelegos worked with the FIESP to put together a generalized wage accord that would defuse the situation, return the strikers to work, and reclaim their leadership role of the Metalworkers' Union.¹²⁶

The strike produced wage increases of 10 to 40 percent, depending on a worker's base wage, with the lowest paid receiving the greatest percentage gains and the highest paid the lowest percentage increases. The Federation of Industries moved to generalize these increases for glass, wood, pharmaceutical, and ceramic workers, brewers, hatters, and others who remained out.¹²⁷ Industrialists knew their workers needed significant wage increases in order to live in the inflationary São Paulo of the 1940s. The FIESP's desire to negotiate a quick settlement also demonstrated industrialists' support of the Estado Novo's industrial relations system. That is, employers feared that workers had gained too much power when individual firms signed accords with factory commissions. FIESP members therefore tried to bolster the pelegos by signing wage settlements with them like those hammered out by the comissões. They hoped this move would reinforce the industrial relations system, which had provided social peace and inexpensive labor.

They then publicly praised those pelegos as great champions of São Paulo's working class.¹²⁸ In 1946, the Federation of Industries wrote to President Dutra explaining how its members had settled the May 1945 strikes specifically to limit the power of these factory commissions and to bolster the position of the pelegos. Many factory owners even created company-controlled factory commissions in the wake of the May strike wave.¹²⁹ The industrialists took such measures in the face of continued worker mobilizations as the Estado Novo seemed to be coming to an end. Indeed, fears of further overtures by Vargas to the working class helped bring about the dictator's ouster at the hands of sectors of the military closely tied to the industrial bourgeoisie.¹³⁰

The militance of the workers' 1945 strike movement highlights the ultimate weakness of Vargas's industrial relations system. The Estado Novo and wartime measures effectively destroyed the independent union movement in São Paulo, but they could not end workers' grassroots organizing. The factory commissions that textile and metallurgical workers had formed to fight harsh conditions on the shop floor, bargain for higher wages, and combat high rents and food costs in their neighborhoods continued to be their most effective tool for survival and resistance. Without access to sympathetic unions and with the Ministry of Labor being run in São Paulo by the state Department of Labor, workers and their commissions were forced to appeal directly to Vargas for support.

So, although the Estado Novo provided the framework for a deepening of industrial development and national integration, it did not control or control all of São Paulo's industrial working class. Indeed, textile and metallurgical workers' resistance to the authoritarian and corporatist system disrupted the linear process of development envisioned by Vargas and his industrialist allies.¹³¹ Further, workers' reactions to the Estado Novo, Brazil's participation in World War II, and the regime's rhetoric of conciliation, national integration, and social justice for all initiated a national debate—part of which would be played out with the writing of a new constitution in 1946—on the question of citizenship. Workers took Vargas's words at face value and began to demand their share of the wealth they were creating. At first, workers wrote humble requests to the dictator, and they clearly thanked Vargas for the rights he had "given" them.¹³² Then, with the initial opening of the political system in 1944-45, São Paulo's industrial workers asserted themselves and struck in the face of their bosses' intransigence.

The playing out of the Estado Novo and World War II did not just

push industrialization forward, it created new terms for workers' struggles for full and equal participation in Brazilian society. The expansion of the national Ministry of Labor and the government-controlled union structure, rather than co-opting and manipulating workers' consciousness, provided a new arena for this struggle. Over the course of the war São Paulo's workers had sacrificed much: they suffered long hours in their factories, declining real wages, and repressive politics. The state Department of Labor continued to represent the federal Ministry of Labor in São Paulo, and the workers' unions were still under the control of the pelegos. Paulistano workers looked forward to the promised opening up of politics and the eventual impact of Vargas's recent changes in the Ministry of Labor. Perhaps after the war São Paulo's working men and women would finally gain access to the social justice so often promised and so brutally denied during the Estado Novo.

The Industrialists' Democracy in São Paulo, 1945—1950

We organized ourselves. After all, we fought World War II, Brazilians died for the war, we worked like slaves for the war. Good, now we had a democracy, so we organized and asked for what was ours.

—Metalworker Edson Borges,
interview, 25 September 1987

Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please, they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past.

—Karl Marx,
The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte

On the morning of 1 August 1947, São Paulo's workers found that the Municipal Transportation Company had increased bus and trolley fares from Cr\$0.60 to Cr\$1.00 and Cr\$0.20 to Cr\$0.50, respectively. Paulistas violently rejected the fare hikes, even though transportation costs after the increases averaged less than 2.5 percent of their total monthly expenditures. During lunch breaks, industrial workers and others who relied on mass transit began discussing the fare hikes. Workers angrily denounced the constant stream of bad news affecting them and then decided to start rocking the buses lined up in the Praça da Sé, Praça Patriarca, and Largo de São Francisco. A group of workers broke up the cobblestone streets and hurled rocks at buses and trolleys. As the crowds grew, people began shouting "*quebra-quebra*" (smash). The Paulistanos broke apart and burned four hundred trolleys and forty-five buses, concentrating their efforts on the trolleys that served the factory districts. The rioters next turned their attention to Governor Adhemar de Barros and decided to punish him for betraying the city's working class. Carrying stones and planks of wood pulled from the trolleys, they marched through a cold rain to nearby city and state government buildings. There they broke windows and ransacked