

Brazilian Area Churns

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Brazil's impoverished northeast region containing 24,000,000 of the country's 73,000,000 people is generating forces that are rapidly spreading from a regional to a national significance.

These forces revolve around the competition to organize the camponeses (peasants) and the rise of Miguel Arraes, Governor of the area's most populous state of Pernambuco.

Francisco Julião's widely publicized Ligas Camponeses (Peasant Leagues), which three years ago plunged the northeast into world prominence and shook the Brazilian ruling classes into an awareness of their revolutionary potential, are being seriously challenged now by Roman Catholic Church-led rural syndicates and orthodox Communist activity.

Support Withdrawn

The orthodox Brazilian Communists once supported Mr. Julião but now consider his radical revolutionary advocacy as poor strategy and are actively seeking to undermine his position. They are trying to infiltrate his Ligas or form rural syndicates of their own, but their success has thus far been limited. As has been their practice in the urban trade-union movement, they have found it easier to attempt to take command of existing syndicates, but their initiative in the rural areas is still at a low level.

Mr. Julião is now organizing Ligas Urbanas in the larger cities, especially Recife. He hopes to wield a force out of recent migrants from the rural areas who are living in the horrible Mocambos (slums) of Recife and paying rent to landlords who obtain the usufruct of these swampland sites from the federal government gratis.

Syndicates Formed

Backed by a high level Roman Catholic Church decision to organize the camponeses before "the Communists take command of the movement," the young Padres Melo and Crespo have formed over 40 syndicates totaling about 60,000 camponeses in Pernambuco during the past 15 months. Last year, a federal law was passed legitimizing formation of rural unions and application for Labor Ministry certification. The church-led unions have had more certifications than the Ligas of Mr. Julião.

Church syndicates differ from Mr. Julião's Ligas in that they are located mostly among the wage workers on the sugar plantations, while the Ligas

are more heavily represented in the sharecropper areas. Syndicates work for more immediate benefits for their members such as better wages, working conditions, enforcement of the rural laborer's law, and elimination of feudal-type impositions such as the notorious cambao under which the camponesa has to work a day or two a week without remuneration for the landowner.

Reform Sought

Ligas spokesmen call for a radical agrarian reform to eliminate the latifundiarios (large landowners) and distribute the land to the camponeses. They describe the rural areas as being under the yoke of the latifundiario with his capangas or private police, and if reform cannot be brought about by law, then force will be needed.

The lines between syndicates and Ligas membership are often blurred with some camponeses belonging to both. Neither kinds of organizations are very tightly organized, and dues are usually whatever a member can pay which is usually nothing.

There is nothing overlapping about the leaders of the two movements, however. Father Melo, at 29 a national known figure, called Mr. Julião "just another politician." He does admit that Mr. Julião was the first in Brazil to bring the misfortune of the rural areas to the country's attention.

Mr. Julião told this reporter that the Melo-Crespo syndicates, by making modest demands, were compromising with the struggle to change fundamentally the feudal agrarian structure. The extent of their success, he continued, would make any basic change even more difficult to achieve. The rapid growth and favorable reaction from certain government officials have encouraged church leaders to plan for nationwide expansion of syndicate formation in the countryside.

While Mr. Julião no longer dominates the camponesa movement in the northeast, his influence and activity have become national in scope. Although now a federal deputy, this influence is not to be confused with political power. Julião is a symbol of agrarian unrest in Brazil, and his importance lies in his social agitation and earthy mixture of radical, moral, and religious appeals drastically to remedy the harsh realities of the back country where some 60 percent of all Brazilians scrape together a bare subsistence.

In the midst of all this agitation is the rising figure of Pernambuco's Governor, Mig-

uel Arraes who, though in office only since January, is easily the leading political personage in the northeast. His election last November was strongly attributed to a coalition of leftists including the outlawed Communist Party. The success of this coalition and subsequent political activity by the Governor on the national scene is leading many observers to consider the Governor as a possible choice for presidential candidate by the Brazilian Left.

Mr. Arraes is developing a new method for entrenching his power in Pernambuco. The Popular Cultural Movement (MCP) which he launched while Mayor of Recife to promote adult literacy is spreading throughout the state. Much of the teaching material has a distinct political message. MCP schools are springing up, and the organization is broadening to include children.

Rewards Received

With literacy a prerequisite for voting, any group that reaches the 70 percent of adults now illiterate may receive tangible rewards at the polls. With the MCP in active operation, the Governor hopes to emerge as a champion against illiteracy.

The political significance of this movement now is being felt throughout the country. Many Brazilians who desire basic reforms from the Congress see an enlarged electorate as one way to reduce the presently overwhelming composition of landowners, merchants, and industrialists in the Congress.

The principal presence of the federal government in the northeast is the development authority, SUDENE, headed by the respected economist, Dr. Celso Furtado. Though Brazil has other development agencies in various regions of the country, none can begin to compare with the scope and forcefulness of SUDENE, which is pioneering in regional planning and execution.

Virtually changeless for centuries, the northeast is now breeding changes whose currents are sweeping over the rest of this vast country.