**Food sovereignty in times of war: *Estado Novo* and techno-scientific policies for the fields of Brazil (1937-1945)**

**Soberania alimentar em temos de guerra: Estado Novo e as políticas tecnocientíficas para os campos do Brasil (1937-1945)**

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**Abstract:** The Second World War in Brazil coincided with the consolidation in the power of Getúlio Vargas and his *Estado Novo*, a process that encouraged agrarian management supported by the institutionalization of science in the State apparatus, as well as the scientific training of State technicians. Thus, techno-scientific authoritarianism was constituted that sought national development by correcting the defects of nature and transforming traditional agriculture. This moment coincides with the process of urbanization, rural exodus, and demographic increase, factors that pressured national rural production and required policies from the State aimed both at conquering international markets and, above all, at supplying domestic food demands. Thus, the work analyses some mechanisms used to guarantee Brazilian food sovereignty, such as the formation of agricultural research networks, the expansion of mass rural education, and the actuation in international agrarian diplomacy.

**Keywords:** Brazil, food sovereignty, interwar, agrarian diplomacy, techno-scientific exchange

Today, Brazil is projecting itself as a food-supplying power, not only in coffee but also in tropical products, both in the Americas and on a world scale. Brazil is currently a giant in the agro-food industry, appearing as a major exporter in the dairy and juice industries (especially orange concentrate, among other fruits), to countries and regions such as the United States, the European Union, and Asia. Brazil also emerges as one of the main exporters of meat products, and, above all, oilseeds and their derivatives, such as soy. Finally, due to the growing world demand, the extraction of products originating from the Amazon region (such as palm oil for the food and energy industry, as well as fruits and herbs for use in the cosmetic and pharmaceutical industry) emerges as a relevant fact.

The explanation to achieve such kind of results in contemporary times has its roots in the gradual development of the management and agrarian administration of the Brazilian State between 1930 and 1945, a period located between the two Great World Wars and the beginning of the Cold War, a moment that coincided with significant domestic contexts, such as the 1930 Revolution, the *Estado Novo* in 1937 and the rise of authoritarianism, Brazil's participation in the Second World War, the deposition of Vargas in 1945 and, finally, for his return to power in 1950, giving new impetus to the era of national development.

During this period, the Brazilian government sought to achieve its food sovereignty through foreign trade, foreign investment, opening up to immigration, promoting national agriculture and industry, encouraging mass education, and the formation and consolidation of a techno-scientific and bureaucratic apparatus for and by the field. One of the most important actors responsible at these times was the Ministry of Agriculture (MA), an institution that focused on the training and consolidation of a body of agrarian technicians within the state apparatus (high and medium-level bureaucrats and also base scale), who were both responsible for thinking and elaborating and implementing public policies for the rural sector in their national and foreign territory during the interwar period.

Thus, this communication analyses the management of the MA and its technicians during the Estado Novo and the Second World War, periods that acted as direct actors in the growing weight of science and technique in the management of policies for the countryside, making it fundamental elements for the organ's reforms in the period between 1939 and 1945. Basing itself on the analysis of the annual reports of the MA, in the bulletins of the organ, as well as in the material produced by the Agricultural Information Service (SIA) and also by the Ministry of International Relations (MRE), the Itamaraty, it was possible to identify that in this period an agrarian administration was consolidated in Brazil based on a technical bureaucracy specialized in the study of rural problems, in the elaboration of projects that aimed at rural modernization and food sovereignty, as well as the control and reform of society and the national economy. Finally, this work is mainly focused on analysing some mechanisms used to guarantee Brazilian food sovereignty, such as the formation of agricultural research networks, the expansion of mass rural education, and the actuation in international agrarian diplomacy. Elements that revealed the close connection between the elaboration and implementation of national agrarian policies accompanied by the intervention of science in agricultural production.

**The Brazilian State´s Reformation and the rising of the Second World War**

To better understand Brazilian policies aimed at guaranteeing food sovereignty, it is necessary to appreciate what kind of modernist agriculture was desired and defended by those who made the agrarian policies of the period after 1930. According to Timothy Mitchell, since the beginning of the 20th century, the national development policy and the economic growth of many Western countries was the techno-scientific policy, the one that was based on promoting a type of knowledge capable of improving the defects of nature, transforming traditional agriculture, rectifying the errors of society and, in this way, repairing the national economy (2002, pp.12-15). In the Brazilian case, this process of intellectual elaboration was not different, since in the first place it was necessary to eradicate a double illness: the first one, from the State; the second, from your citizens. In the case of sanitation of the State, according to Tiago Saraiva, the national soil should feed the national body (2016, p.7). There was in those times a radical nationalism of scientific inspiration, where the scientific leadership was an indisputable authority, making science and the State not seen as occupants of different bodies (SARAIVA, 2016, p.7).

According to Mitchell, the technicians offered more than the promise of agricultural development or technical progress, they offered the possibility of readjusting the natural space as a means of demonstrating the strength of the Modern State and its economic power (2002, pp.12-15). In this way, it was necessary to institutionalize social and economic progress, to build a strong State, where nature was seen as supporting national development. Ideas that were perpetuated in the agrarian policy of the period and that were directly associated with a civilizing process of national scope, which sought to abandon the old concepts of the Brazilian countryside and replace them with the notion of a productive agrarian sector, formed by healthy and able rural workers to boost the country's economy.

In the case of recovering the Brazilian citizens, it was necessary to develop what Regina Horta Duarte called the “pedagogy of the national nature”, where it was necessary to instruct rural workers on the best methods of cultivation and action on the natural world to strengthen the national economy (2010, p.10). At that time, the Brazilian population was still predominantly rural, a situation that gradually changed in the middle of the 1940 decade. At that time, to be a rural worker identified with the new techniques, the so-called “progressive farmer”, it was necessary to have broad agricultural knowledge and for that reason the need to expand agricultural education. There was faith in science and technology as redeemers of poverty, cultural attitudes and traditional values considered retrograde, as well as certain ethnic characteristics seen as synonymous with deviance or abnormality.

The people who disrupted the progressive ideas of the State were usually identified as the illiterate, the malnourished and sick *caboclo* (mestizo), the poor immigrant, and the small ignorant farmer. They had to be reformed using rural education, since this was the right path for the creation of a new type of citizen able to live in a country that, according to the elites and the bureaucrats, was marching toward progress. Therefore, some of the mechanisms used in educational policies for the countryside had wide dissemination just like the agricultural extension programs, the creation of agricultural clubs for the formation of young leaders, the ruralist weeks, the sanitation campaigns, rural missions, propaganda of new techniques by radio cinema and home economics courses for women, among other methods.

It’s important to say that some of the main administrative transformations in the MA followed this logic and coincided with the implementation of the *Estado Novo*, a historical stage that initiated a wide range of managerial and political reforms, especially with the implementation of the Public Service Administrative Department (DASP). The department promoted the formation of a bureaucratic elite, supported by a specialized scientific and technical culture, dispersed in different ministries, which assumed positions of leadership of divisions and sections, ordering budgets, introducing new methods and techniques considered more rational and efficient for the bureaucratic services (for example, the universalization of procedures), as well as organized the selection processes for entering the public career (meritocratic access and public tenders). In specific terms of personnel training, DASP acted directly in coordination with the MA, whether in campaigns to disseminate best administrative practices or to guide the holding of courses, both in Brazil and abroad. The Ministerial Bulletin of July 1941 informed that the Agricultural Information Service (SIA) of the MA operated in perfect integration with the Department of Press and Propaganda (DIP) and the DASP, especially in the dissemination of agricultural campaigns and good administrative practices for the sector between departments of the ministry, as well as between state secretariats (BMA, 1941, pp.7-8). In addition, according to the president of DASP, Luís Simões Lopes (1903-1994), the MA concentrated the largest group of valuable technicians in agronomy, veterinary medicine, chemistry, and mining engineering, among other areas, in the country, something that would facilitate the technical and economic progress in Brazil. For this reason, the first courses of improvement, specialization, and extension (CAE) were first implemented in the MA in 1939, even before the other ministries, functioning as a kind of training laboratory for State technicians, something that would be expanded to the entire federal sphere (BMA, 1941, pp.7-8).

Between 1938 and 1939, the MA passed through a structural reformation that was not limited to an exclusive action in the agricultural domain, since its attributions included, from then on, the promotion and guidance of all extractive production, essential to the country's economic independence and food sovereignty. The organ's reform followed three main axes: 1) maintenance of the three great national departments created in 1934, which were the National Departments of Animal, Vegetal and Mineral Production; 2) implantation of new bodies detached from the national departments and which guaranteed the minister direct control over certain areas classified as priorities; 3) acceleration of the process of centralization/nationalization of economic decisions in the field of agriculture through the installation of ministerial agencies in all regions of the country. In this last case, Plant Production Promotion services were set up (one per state), Animal Sanitary Defence inspectorates (in a total of seven across the country's major regions), Plant Health Defence inspectorates (in a total of eight per region), and State Agricultural Inspectorates (MENDONÇA, 2013, pp.43/61/80).

The command of this major ministerial reform, which took place between 1938 and 1939, fell to the Minister of Agriculture Fernando Costa (1886-1946), whose management began in 1937 and who would remain in office until 1941. In the Ministerial Bulletin of December 1940, Costa was defined as: “the first agronomist director, the first agronomist deputy, the first agronomist state secretary, and the first agronomist minister” (BMA, 1940, p.48). His election as Minister of Agriculture was based both on technical factors since he was the first agronomist to occupy the highest position in the country's federal agrarian management (in obedience to DASP principles), and on political factors: Costa was from São Paulo state, and the MA since 1930 had been occupied by representatives of states not linked to the hegemonic coffee production, with representatives from São Paulo relegated to the background in the management of the body until his ascension as Ministry. It was precisely during the administration of Minister Costa that the Second World War began.

Brazil's position during the conflict, both in terms of the international market and of the American continent, has been widely studied by national historiography. For this reason, this communication focuses mainly on the impacts and effects of the war on policies related to the MA, on the reforms that this body gave rise to in its organizational structure, and on the policies that were promoted for the national productive sector, especially related to the national goal of food sovereignty. In the years before the war, the pendulum game established by Brazil between Germany and the United States sought to extract greater commercial and technological advantages from both, a policy defined by Gerson Moura as “pragmatic equidistance”, mainly between 1935 and 1941. For Amado Cervo, this policy aimed to extract development inputs from the international system, in line with the goals established to meet domestic demands (2015, p.32). Therefore, the decision to align or not with the totalitarian or democratic powers was postponed as long as possible to the point of asserting the negotiating power in case of eventual participation in the war conflict.

Germany was considered an alternative to British and American domination by a large part of the intellectual elite and the highest echelons of the Brazilian government between the 1930s and 1940s, who showed great admiration for the German model of administrative management. Despite the great rapprochement with Germany between 1934 and 1938, with the increase in commercial agreements, the numerous presence of German immigrants on the national soil, the exchange of weapons and police collaboration, and the ambiguity of Vargas before the totalitarian regimes, Brazil did not support the powers of the Axes. According to Clodoaldo Bueno, however, the III Reich had objective conditions to meet the Brazilian demands, the alignment of Brazil with the United States did not take place solely for reasons of material nature, but that was how the continuity of a friendship was reaffirmed and the leadership of the North American country was recognized to honour Pan-Americanism ideals (2015, p.52). Thus, the wavering policy of Getúlio Vargas throughout the 1930s ended with the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour on December 7, 1941, at which time the United States demanded continental solidarity among the American countries.

It is a fact that much of the Brazilian support for the Allies is due to the Good Neighbour policy of Franklin Delano Roosevelt (1882-1945). According to Bóris Fausto, by supporting the aligned countries, Vargas went on to speak more clearly the language of Pan-Americanism, at the same time he wanted to re-equip the country economically and militarily, so he imposed conditions of support for the United States. Behind the edifying rhetoric was a strategy to promote economic integration in the hemisphere: on the one hand, the desire of the Brazilian government to access the United States market; on the other hand, the United States is interested in recovering the destabilized economy after the war (FAUSTO, 2001, p.211). Different results came from this cooperation, from the establishment of the Volta Redonda national iron and steel industry in Rio de Janeiro, to the sending of military support by Brazil with the Brazilian Expedition Force (FEB) for operations in Italy, to the permission to install military bases Americans in the North and Northeast of the country, tied to the hiring of workers for the removal of rubber on the *seringal’* forest, the so-called “rubber soldiers”, raw material considered essential for the war efforts. In this way, President Vargas understood that Brazil was an important factor in the defence plans of the United States and tried to extract from the Allies as many advantages as possible in the field of international relations. This dynamic was quite evident in the cooperation agreements for the realization of public policies for the rural sector, at a time when the interference of the United States government in the Brazilian countryside became more evident, once its performance was turned towards the achievement of economic and productive ends, the food sovereignty as well as the defence of non-continental geopolitical and ideological interests.

In this sense, the role of Brazil as a supplier of raw materials for the Allies was a relevant factor in the conduct of the country's agricultural policy by the MA, appearing both as a justification for the implementation of protection measures for the products, and for the internal organization of production on its various levels, especially related to the food offer for the domestic consumer market. Alongside a ministry at war, it is possible to state that there was a ministry dedicated to the promotion of agro-industrial and industrial production, extractive structures, and technical and rural education in general. Thus, as a result of the pressures on the world economy and the binational strategic agreements between Brazil and the allied countries, there was a very clear orientation for the conduction of the economy of production, seen from then on as a strategic issue. In this way, the most diverse sectors, both energy, mining, and the promotion of animal and vegetable production (and even the olive oil, vegetable oil, dairy products, and rubber agroindustries) were in charge of different bodies of the federal administration and also of the government itself. MA, leading to strategic priorities oriented both towards a growth plan and internal industrialization, as well as to an alignment with the allied forces.

Thus, a new chapter of economic policy was created with the organization of markets for agricultural products, with the creation of bodies in charge of coordinating the measures for each product, in addition to measures of control, organization, inspection, and defence of agricultural production that now aimed to follow the export parameters and thus guarantee a space for Brazil in the expanding international market. According to Costa, in these bodies, the public power began to act in collaboration with individuals, producers, and consumers, applying principles of directed economy, and passing the technical methods to exert a decisive action on the agricultural professions. At the same time, production plans became the responsibility of technical and economic councils, with broad powers of intervention in national production, even in fiscal and commercial matters, all of this in the face of difficult economic conditions worldwide and the need to guarantee a space for Brazilian products in the international market.

At the same time, this new political orientation for the agricultural sector was also exposed in the Ministry of Agriculture Bulletin of August 1941, which featured an interview with the agronomist Arthur Torres Filho (1889-1960), a nationally renowned intellectual and technician, who at the time was Director of the Rural Economy Service (SER) of the MA, about the consequences of the international conflict on Brazilian rural life. It is possible to say that his speeches synthesized some of the ideas that were adopted by the MA when Brazil entered the world conflict. Torres Filho stated that, with the closure of European consumer markets for around 50% of Brazilian products, it was necessary to strengthen the internal market and stimulate the exchange of products in the Pan-American space, to guarantee Brazil's food sovereignty in the region. According to the agronomist, the basis of Brazil's political economy lay in the ruralization of the country, and industrial growth depended on the support found in the sources of agricultural production (BMA, 1941, pp.17-23). The progress of agriculture in times of war was therefore subject to the articulation of technique, economics, and agrarian sociology. The tripod would be supported by social and economic assistance to rural workers (from the recovery of health and education to the formation of unions and agricultural unions), by carrying out economic and social research, and, finally, by financial and credit assistance (BMA, 1941, pp.17-23). Tripod that would be expanded at the end of the war, especially from the context of the Cold War, and in governments subsequent to Vargas.

Costa's mandate ended in 1941, and in 1942 Apolônio Sales (1904-1982), a specialist in tropical products such as cotton and sugar cane, took over the MA's direction. Sales had been a professor of Rural Economics at the Higher School of Agriculture of Pernambuco, as well as an assistant at the Agricultural Experimentation Service and Secretary of Agriculture of the state of Pernambuco, a state located in the Northeast region of Brazil, characterized for its dry season and the neediest population at that time. It’s important to mention that the expansion of state policies aimed at the development of the Northeast region, many related to the social and economic impact generated by the periods of severe droughts (the ones of 1945 and 1951 to 1953 being especially serious). In addition, the scarce productive resources and the large population contingent in a situation of poverty made the region a propitious space for rural migration, causing rural exodus towards the metropolis, and also demands for agrarian reform, which lead to the formation of the first Peasant Leagues,[[1]](#footnote-1) as they would be driven by the Brazilian Communist Party – PCB, from 1945 onwards.

According to Newton de Castro Belleza, Sales was used to the financial limitations of the public administration when he served as secretary of Agriculture in Pernambuco, an area accustomed to periods of severe drought, slower production rates, and little investment, which is why his choice as minister at the height of wartime served the idea that it was necessary to save as much as possible the small resources available (1955, pp.30-31). In this way, the new minister intended to give MA management a sense of greater economy, especially concerning state budgets in times of war, not necessarily restricting expenses, but, above all, seeking to translate into income the agricultural activity of the organizations that were under ministry competence. It is possible to state that the new rural ideology defended by Torres Filho would become a political practice in the Brazilian agrarian world under the management of Sales.

With Sales, the agrarian transformation was prepared for the new international demands that requested greater productive participation from Brazil, following the motto of “total mobilization” to face the great war. The campaign initiated by Vargas, whose summary phrase was “Produce more and better”, expressed the objective of joining efforts to accelerate the pace of economic progress by stimulating agriculture and food production. In this way, the objective was to guarantee both the requirements of the domestic market and the conquest of leadership in the supply of raw materials in international markets. According to Vargas: “Like the foresighted ants, it was necessary to have barns full of food” (BMA, 1942, p.63). For the presidential order to be fulfilled, the MA began to demand the collaboration of all producers in the country, in a way to intensify their activities and improve production, encouraging farmers, breeders, and rural industrialists to follow the advice of the ministry's technicians, in addition, to be encouraged to seek their support.

It was common to find in MA ministerial bulletins during the war years phrases such as: “Food is a weapon in the fight against Hitlerism”; “Food will win the war and make peace”; “The mission of the agronomist is peace and civilization”; “Brazilian producers, fulfil your duties by filling our country's barns”; and, the most popular of them, “Plant for victory”. From then on, the Vargas government's media campaign aimed to incite moral and civic duties towards the nation in rural workers, with the producing classes understood as soldiers on the front line of the war effort. The same stimulus was applied to the ministry's technicians, whose social function began to assume new magnitudes in the face of the war context. In the ministerial bulletins of the body, the published articles presented the MA as a body of vital importance for the Brazilian public administration, mainly because it had a large group of specialists, including agronomists, veterinarians, mining engineers, chemists, and economists. In many texts, it was stated that the success of the mission of the ministry's agrarian technicians "depended on the economic future of Brazil" (BMA, 1942, pp.23-24). In this sense, it can be said that the ideology promoted by the government attributed to some of the technical classes of the MA the responsibility of feeding the troops, as well as the duty of supplying raw materials to the allied countries, and mainly, to achieve the national food sovereignty. Thus, the correlation between the reforms inserted in a situation of profound political transformation in Brazil and the changes inspired by geopolitical circumstances is evident. Factors that led, on the one hand, to a new positioning of the country in the international order and, on the other hand, the demand for a specific technical profile to achieve rural production goals in the international food organizations´ arena.

**The Food Supply Program in Brazil and the Brazilian-American Commission for Food Products (CBAGA)**

Thinking in terms of food sovereignty in times of war, it’s important to say that different types of cooperation between Brazil and the United States were launched from the moment that Brazil started to support the Allied countries. From 1941, Brazil allowed the installation of US naval and air bases in the coastal zone of the Northeast, especially in the state of Rio Grande do Norte, and in this way, agreements were signed between both countries for the agricultural development of the zone, which was also destined to guarantee the supply of the allied military troops installed in the region. The main agreement was signed by both governments, with the participation of the MA and the Institute of Inter-American Affairs (IIAA), in 1942. Entitled *Food Supply Program in Brazil,* lasting for two years, the treaty had the following objectives: 1) increase the local production of food items to meet the needs of the United States Armed Forces in Brazil; 2) facilitate its storage in areas of strategic importance in the needs of war; 3) help the Brazilian government to develop food sources; and 4) provide training in agricultural practices and home economics for Brazilians technicians and rural population, which should give continuity to the food program (MENDONÇA, 2010, p.71).

Originated from the *Food Supply Program*, one of the first technical exchange programs with the United States was the Brazilian-American Commission for Food Products (CBAGA), which functioned as the executive body of the signed agreement and offered technical assistance, distribution of seeds, machinery, and agricultural credits to an area that included the North and Northeast regions of the country. Through the agreement to create the CBAGA, while the Brazilian government provided personnel, land, and money for works aimed at cultivating practices, the IIAA would contribute with American technicians and training. In this sense, the CBAGA developed five main programs: distribution of seeds (rice, beans, corn, and cassava); expansion of fruit and vegetable production; seed production and storage; distribution of agricultural tools and materials; and, finally, vocational training for rural workers and techno-scientific training for Brazilian technicians from the MA.

For the training of rural workers, about 9 schools were organized and installed, which were supported by the pedagogy of "learning-by-doing", an opportunity in which farmers were introduced to modern farming methods brought by American experts. More than contributing to the training of these workers and promoting their socio-professional insertion in the labour market, the US intervention in the North and Northeast regions of Brazil ended up reinforcing the idea of subalternity of the rural population located in those areas. Although material from Brazilian archives has been reviewed, and to a lesser extent from US collections, it can be said that the documentary sources draw a picture of scepticism about the learning potential of national workers. According to some reports, it was found that very few trained men were capable of intelligently using the basic production equipment and tools, a problem to which the experts proposed as a solution the establishment of six training units of mechanized agriculture, whose objectives would be to train young people with a greater inclination to operate agricultural machines, help Brazil to mechanize its agriculture and develop a training program in the United States (MENDONÇA, 2010, p.77). The main idea, therefore, was to contribute to the commercialization of machines at the national level, thus generating the mechanization of the Brazilian countryside as it is considered the most effective method of production, without providing a true educational or social or labour transformation in the areas covered by the project.

Regarding the training of State technicians, it is important to highlight that, due to the agreement signed, with the development of rational agriculture in perspective, more than 50 Brazilian agrarian technicians from different specialities and degrees were sent to the United States with scholarships for study and research to training. It should also be mentioned that a nutrition course was started in the city of Fortaleza, in the state of Ceará, aimed at preparing personnel dedicated to rural extension work, with more than 250,000 brochures and publications on feeding issues. At this point, it is important to say that the work carried out by the CBAGA included the presentation of cinematographic films organized by the Agricultural Information Service (SIA), of the MA, being the material, to a large extent, of American origin which was translated after a treaty made between both countries (SALES, 1945, p.13).

It is important to mention that the input received by this agreement was varied and on a large scale. Until the end of the war, 40 aviaries, 31 rice processing plants, 10 flour houses, 9 large-scale pig-rearing, 870-grain storage silos, 24 large commercial orchards, 5 stations were built and installed, 37 experimental seed fields, 27 development fields, 21 irrigation fields, in addition to the distribution of 6,560,000 kilos of corn, bean, and rice seeds, in addition to the distribution of 1,500,000 kilos of seeds, 20,000 hoes among other tools farms, 12 tractors, 394 plows among other materials (SALES, 1945, p.12). Finally, rather than contributing to the increase in production in areas considered to be of low national production, the Brazilian-American Commission for Food Products (CBAGA) represented the outline of a new rural intervention mechanism in the countryside that would be better developed at the beginning of the Cold War, which would promote a specific type of modernization supported by extension tactics, rural credit, and technical assistance, encouragement of mechanization, and massive rural education.

**Brazilian Agrarian Diplomacy in search of food sovereignty in the initial years of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)**

In the context of the Second World War, numerous factors contributed so that agriculture and food strategies were seen as an essential dimension in global relations, and its recovery was the centre of debates in the planning of public national policies. Vargas's policy pursued a clear goal, which was the transformation of an essentially agricultural country into an industrial power, an element that was vital for the definition of an identity and a mode of action in the international sphere. According to Clodoaldo Bueno, in the mid-1930s, economic and social transformations led the elites in power to a new perception of national interest, with foreign policy being used as an instrument for a centralizing national development project (2015, p.252). For Pedro Fonseca, the main change that took place from this moment on was the preference for signing bilateral agreements, which represents a shift in the liberal conception of international trade of the preceding period (2013, p.158). In 1934, Vargas named no less than 30 countries with which he had signed bilateral trade agreements. The trade treaty signed in 1935 with the United States may be the one that arouses the most historiographical interest, since it established advantages for some Brazilian export products (such as cocoa, coffee, and rubber) and reduced import tariffs on certain products from 20% to 60% of US industrial items, such as machines and technical supplies (FONSECA, 2013, p.159). It should also be mentioned that the reform of the Ministry of Foreign Relations (MRE) in 1934 opened space for broad cultural diplomacy and for the systematization of agreements on cooperation with other Latin American countries (for example, the country was represented in all American International Conferences).

In this sense, the case study that is presented below is directly connected to the national and international policy of Vargas for the years from 1937 to 1945, and perhaps they can explain how the agricultural theme, especially based on the technical and scientific knowledge held by the servants of MA, acted as an instrument for a new role for Brazil on the continent - and in the world - in the war period. The technical strength achieved by the MA in Varguismo, therefore, was a determining factor in the decision of the MRE to have the support of experts in international agrarian change projects, even though they did not have a diplomatic profile or direct performance in that career, which is the case of Newton de Castro Belleza of the MA whose career as an agronomist is linked with the formative moments of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). Belleza, an elite techno bureaucrat, was appointed to act as a permanent delegate, as well as a member of the Executive Committee and deputy director of the body between 1943 and 1950, without being a career diplomat. The questions revolve around the options that were available to Latin America and Brazil in particular at the time of the end of the great war, when the international community sought to coordinate efforts to order the food and agricultural scenario in a global context of concertation in the post-war conflict. It should be mentioned that, in addition to serving the achievement of the main national political goal (industrial transformation), the technical performance abroad of Belleza served as a foreign policy strategy, especially concerned about food sovereignty, by positioning Brazil as an active interlocutor and protagonist in advisory missions, technical and agricultural diplomacy at the global and regional level.

In 1943, the discussion about the need to create a world organization to promote agriculture was not new. The creation of the International Institute of Agriculture (IIA), in Rome in 1905, for example, represented the first attempt at an organization aimed at promoting innovative resources for the countryside and the circulation of knowledge, such as the cooperative and credit rural system (FAO, 2003, p.28). However, the socioeconomic challenges that arose from the 1929 crisis and the Second World War contributed to fostering the development of an organization with greater international expression. The institution should have a permanent nature, be eminently technical and aimed at rescuing agriculture, providing means of solving the urgent problem of food and hunger, and at the same time, generating greater political support and international links (FAO, 2003, p.27). In the context of the end of the Second World War, three factors were considered relevant for the convocation of the First United Nations Conference on Food and Agriculture.

The first one is based on the consequences of the war blockades at an intercontinental level, this produced a new binational institution (United Kingdom-United States) destined to regulate the trade of raw materials and food. To solve the possibility of a resurgence of isolationist ideas and self-sufficiency, the victorious powers thought of a multilateral scheme that would promote the solution of problems related to agriculture and food at a global level. A second factor was that the victorious capitalist countries agreed to promote technological development in the so-called Third World, within the framework of the bipolar tension, the Cold War, and above all the Green Revolution. Finally, food needs and the debates on the new demands posed by the European and Asian economic reconstruction, and the imminent processes of decolonization had an influence. The very concept of hunger had changed, it was no longer considered an issue determined solely by the cycles of nature, but a social, economic, and public health problem that could be combated with appropriate measures. In this sense, it is worth noting the role of the dissemination and circulation of research by medical experts and nutritionists among politicians. This is the case of the contact that took place in 1943 between the President of the United States, Franklin Delano Roosevelt (1882-1945), and the Australian nutritionist Frank McDougall (1884-1958). The latter who since the 1930s promoted international measures on food products, and he was a promoter of the cause of food health to solve the problems of poverty and malnutrition (FAO, 1985, pp.5-7).

The First Conference was held in 1943, in the US city of Hot Springs, with the participation of 44 countries. In it, it was decided to create a permanent organization, which would integrate the activities of the IIA and which sought to order and rationalize food consumption, as well as promote the increase in its production and systematize its distribution. According to Belleza’s report addressed to Foreign Minister Aranha, the Hot Springs conference was considered the first peace conference, despite being held in full belligerence, since it was necessary to plan the global collective behaviour during the post-war period, especially in relation to the production of food since "it was not only necessary to win the war, but to build peace of course".[[2]](#footnote-2) The first impression that Belleza gave at the Hot Springs conference was to be a vehicle of political propaganda for Vargas’s government. This did not happen by chance, propaganda was one of the main weapons of President Getúlio Vargas for the creation of a nationalist culture, an instrument for the construction of an imaginary and representations that defined him as a visionary statesman, who would drive Brazil to a vanguard position on the continent.

In this first conference, surveys were carried out on the nutritional specificities of the countries to instruct the organization and understanding of the nutritional situation among the participating nations. Belleza was the technical manager designated to answer the document, which very soon became material for the frank disclosure of the advantages of producing on Brazilian soil. According to the agronomist, in Brazil there would be no restriction on climate or land for the expansion of food production, and "the world should consider Brazil as one of the great food reserves for food making".[[3]](#footnote-3) For Belleza, Brazil had already taken clear steps to achieve food stability, especially in the case of the rural population, and the document went on to highlight the numerous projects carried out in the country to improve the food transport and storage system, the manufacture of agricultural machinery through the development of the steel and iron industries, the creation of experimental stations for the improvement of seeds, new cultivation methods and the creation of livestock. The text highlighted the achievements of the educational system in rural areas, having the Brazilian government created agricultural clubs as an extension of elementary schools, which taught children what they should eat, and, above all, how to grow their own food. Popular public kitchens had also been established in Rio de Janeiro and other parts of the country, where food required for maintaining health was offered at very low prices, while production was stimulated. Even more, the Legislative Power guaranteed the right to the national minimum wage to increase the quality of life of the population. In addition to this, Belleza argued that the country was already carrying out a more convenient immigration policy for Brazil, intending to avoid possible ethnic complications.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Another important theme in Belleza's work is her performance at a time when a new food and production geopolitics was defined for the post-war period. The promoters of the Hot Springs conference justified the organisation's creation with the problem of poor distribution of food products among the people, which led the nations to a state of international belligerence. However, in the perception of Belleza, there were other reasons at play, which were not openly expressed, but which prompted the creation of an international body. According to him, the organization's campaign to create a rational diet, increase agricultural production and facilitate the circulation of products throughout the world would raise the standard of living and develop the purchasing power of many countries. This was cause for concern in the US press, since the improvement in the living standards of the other nations after the war would cause development and economic expansion, generating unsustainable economic competition. According to him, each of the powers participating in the conference sought to guarantee the satisfaction of their own interests in the competition against other countries, and thus order the post-war space of influence of each nation.[[5]](#footnote-5)

Thus, as a delegate, one of Belleza's main concerns was to provide relevant information for the construction of a geopolitical map that could guide Brazil in its international actions. The agronomist recognized two geopolitical concerns: one global and the other regional, at the Latin American level. Regarding the first, Belleza pointed out that the United Kingdom wanted to restore the old formulas of economic liberalism and rejected any measure that implied a relaxation of liberal principles. On the other hand, in the Latin American concert, Belleza's concerns revolved around Brazil's leadership in South America. In 1943, the bureaucrat alerted Foreign Minister Aranha about the possibility of losing Latin American leadership if Argentina joined the organization:

The commentators at the Hot Springs conference, in which the Argentine Republic did not participate, when they cite the reserve sources of supply of the world's food products, refer to Canada, Argentina, New Zealand, the United States, and other exporting countries... Brazil is among the others, which shows that our production is not considered. It is not surprising, therefore, that, in the post-war period, there is a risk of displacement of the leadership of the Latin American countries in favour of the Argentine Republic, due to the volume of its production, under the influence of the interests of some great power. It is advisable that we remain empowered to make the most of the international situation that is going to be created. (...) Under the creative guidance of President Getúlio Vargas, we have unique political, economic, and financial interests in South America to defend and sustain as much as possible, in the guidelines that must be drawn for life after the war.[[6]](#footnote-6)

It is interesting to note the difference in perception within the Brazilian delegation, since the concerns of the Brazilian diplomatic agents were different from those of Belleza and were more focused on Mexico. The plenipotentiary minister Carlos Maximiano de Figueiredo (1894-1973), chief delegate at the Hot Springs Conference, in a report addressed to Foreign Minister Aranha affirmed the desire that Brazil be part of the organization's Board of Directors since there were few positions and several countries that wanted them. Figueiredo's concern with the Mexican performance in the Interim Commission was clear since the delegate of that country sought to stand out in the Latin American group. His discomfort lay in the fact that Mexico was cited with some frequency in the United States press as the country that had contributed the most to the harmony of the continent. In addition, Russia was enjoying extraordinary influence within the United Nations and had its best political-diplomatic facility in Mexico. With a possible entry of Russia into the organization, the expansion of its political prestige could be based on Mexico or another Latin American country, but not on Brazil, which until now had not recognized the Soviet government.[[7]](#footnote-7)

In another Belleza report addressed to the Minister of Agriculture Apolônio Sales, the agronomist defended the indispensable participation of Brazil in the international organization and the need to make the most in the institution that would be created, even if it was small the Brazilian influence in the solution of the problems. Perhaps in a kind of corporatist protection, the great novelty of this document is Belleza's clear defence of the actions of agronomists in the new international organization. A larger Brazilian diplomatic representation was necessary, he argued, since the nature of the organization was technical and required experts. In his understanding, an ideal delegation demanded "the presence of a diplomat and three technicians, one specialized in food, another in agricultural production, and another in product circulation".[[8]](#footnote-8) According to Belleza, the Brazilian representation should not "passively await requests regarding technical issues, such as food, agricultural production and circulation of products" and defended that “the country could be an active disseminator of techno-scientific information”.[[9]](#footnote-9) This defence of the value of officials of agrarian diplomacy would continue later, in the following meetings in Quebec, in 1945.

The beginning of the report does not clash with the rest of the document on the Hot Spring Conference in 1945. By taking part in the Agriculture Subcommittee, Belleza actively collaborated so that the rural education program was accepted by the organization, in addition, he defended the need for electrification as a means for social welfare in rural areas. At the agriculture subcommittee meeting, Belleza noted an absence of education issues on the conference agenda. Among the extensive forms of teaching was the visual, provided through the cinema, but there was no mention of education through the radio, so he devoted himself to explaining that auditory education was at least as important as visual education and it even presented greater facilities for diffusion. The agronomist proposed that the organization promote radio education in its programs, for having functions of greater value. His proposal, according to his account, was accepted unanimously. Once again it can be added that his statement that hearing education was important was correlated with the ideas of agricultural extension that were current in the United States and that, hand in hand with development policies, would spread in Latin America in the post-war period. It seems that, at the Quebec meeting, and earlier at the Hot Spring, the interventionist schemes that would later become transnational instruments of agrarian diplomacy of the countries aligned with the United States in the Cold War were being built.

However, at the end of the Quebec conference, Belleza, in her communication with Minister João Neves da Fontoura of Itamaraty, recounted that Brazil's performance was less than desirable. In Brazilian Quebec’s delegation, there were no representatives of the various specialities required on the agenda, or at least those that should be the most important for Brazil. The result was that "almost everything happened without our participation, without our assistance, while other countries of lesser importance than Brazil were playing a more prominent role in the progress of the work".[[10]](#footnote-10) For him, all this picture in the Quebec Conference led Canada to take the lead and that very soon Mexico would not be far from wresting primacy from us in Latin America, the tragedy being completed with the possible entry of Argentina into the organization. For Belleza, Brazil's loss of prestige at the Quebec conference went against the great potential that the country presented. According to him, the geographical (location and extension), economic (the possibilities of almost complete self-sufficiency), and political (its performance abroad) conditions pointed to Brazil as one of the four great centres of universal equilibrium in terms of food sovereignty and food exportation, next to China, Russia and the United States.[[11]](#footnote-11) As proposed solutions to improve Brazil's performance in international conferences an abundant agricultural production would be essential and this could only be guaranteed by the technique and state technicians of the MA.

In the period that goes from 1946 to 1950, it is known that in 1946, at the Conference in Copenhagen, Denmark, the performance of the Brazilian delegation managed to consolidate a certain international prestige for the country, obtaining several successes in voting proposed by Belleza. In 1947, Belleza participated as a permanent delegate in the Conference of Geneva, Switzerland, the World Emergency Food Council, the Rural Welfare Committee, and the World Food Council. At Washington Conference in 1948, Belleza was chosen as one of the three vice-delegates, occupying one of the highest positions in the agency before Josué de Castro (1908-1973)[[12]](#footnote-12) himself, who would be the second Brazilian with the greatest projection to achieve key positions in the agency, mainly in matters related to nutrition. In 1950, Belleza was dismissed from the mission and no longer acted in FAO. Even though the available documents do not allow a deeper analysis of Belleza's actions in the function of an agrarian diplomat, the theme that stands out in these papers is humanism, referring to Belleza's ideology about the preponderance of the human over the institution. This idea was already present in his participation in Hot Springs, when he highlighted that the institutions arose for the service of man and that they would be worthless if they were against his well-being or his balance. Also in Copenhagen, Belleza championed the idea that rural prosperity was not the exclusive concern of the Agriculture Committee, much less the Rural Hygiene Committee, being more a problem of social improvement than agrarian. For Belleza, the problem was above all related to education, and for this reason, the Social Welfare Committee should examine effective action mechanisms to improve people's living conditions:

Food depends on agriculture and agriculture depends on education. Only education can dispel the apathy and indifference related to the acceptance of poor food, a poor house, and the lack of desire to improve living conditions. If the purposes of the FAO are achieved, the people of the world must be educated in the direction of a better life. This is the great work of education which must be an integral part of FAO.[[13]](#footnote-13)

**Final considerations**

The objective of the communication was to present the strategies of Brazil in search of food sovereignty in the interwar years. During this period, the Brazilian government tried, through the techno-scientific apparatus, to guarantee the modernization of the State and its citizens through agrarian policies that sought to transform the rural space from an archaic place to a modern one. It was intended to identify the alternatives of action that were presented to Brazil in a still unpredictable international context and where Latin America was no longer the centre of investment of developed countries.

On one hand, it was possible to understand the internal agrarian policy of Vargas in the years related to that world conflict and the strategies used by the MA to guarantee national interests in times of international crisis and internal government reformations. On the one hand, it was fundamental to have agronomists in the most important technical positions, such as ministers and delegates at international organizations, technical roles that were characterized by seeking to leverage the productive and commercial force in Brazil both to supply the internal market, achieve food sovereignty and to integrate itself into the expanding international trade. On the other hand, the interaction of technicians from Brazil and the United States in projects of food production in the Northeast of the country, acted in the creation of a network of knowledge and in the capitalization of techniques and methodologies of cultivation of tropical products that served the location of the country in the post-war international market, serving as a sample button of techno-scientific connections that would be expanded from 1946, with the largest presence of public and private agencies from the United States in the region.

Finally, this communication aimed to understand how the outbreak of World War II acted as a catalyst for defining the directions of Brazilian foreign and internal policy in terms of food sovereignty, as well as serving to support studies that would evaluate the strategies used by the Brazilian government to guarantee national interests at a time of great economic and social instability.

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1. Given the difficulty of organizing a rural union - which should be recognized by the Ministry of Labour, as well as receive authorization from the landowners, who mostly did not accept the creation of unions of rural workers in their possessions -, the peasant league emerged as an alternative for political organization in a context of frank dispute between workers and the regional agrarian elite. They operated mainly in the Northeast region, in the state of Pernambuco, and, starting in 1945, they expanded, when legal demands were associated with political mobilization. With the military coup of 1964, the associations were harshly repressed. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. MRE, Álbum 80.1.17, *Conferência de Alimentação e Agricultura*, Copenhague-Washington, January -February 1944-1946. Report from Newton de Castro Belleza to Oswaldo Aranha, 31.05.1943 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. MRE, Álbum 80.1.17, *Conferência de Alimentação e Agricultura*, Copenhague-Washington, January -April, 1944-1946. *General Statement Regarding Food Situation in Brazil*, 21.05.1943. Answer for Section I, Committe1, FAO. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The new ethnic complications were related to the entry of German and Italian immigrants, peoples identified with the Axis and considered unwanted in times of war. MRE/BR, Álbum 80.1.17, Conferência de Alimentação e Agricultura, Copenhague-Washington, January-April 1944-1946. *Resposta ao sumário proposto pela Seção II, Comitê 4.* [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. MRE, Álbum 80.1.17, *Conferência de Alimentação e Agricultura*, Copenhague-Washington, January-April, 1944-1946. Report from Newton de Castro Belleza to Oswaldo Aranha, 31.05.1943. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. MRE, Álbum 80.1.17, *Conferência de Alimentação e Agricultura*, Copenhague-Washington, January-April, 1944-1946. Report from Newton de Castro Belleza to Oswaldo Aranha, 31.05.1943. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. MRE, Álbum 80.1.17, *Conferência de Alimentação e Agricultura*, Copenhague-Washington, January-April, 1944-1946. Report from Newton de Castro Belleza to Oswaldo Aranha, 31.05.1943. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. MRE, Álbum 80.2.1, *Delegação do Brasil na FAO,* 1947-1948. Report from Newton de Castro Belleza to Carlos Silvestre de Ouro Preto, 20.08.1948. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. MRE, Álbum 80.1.17, *Conferência de Alimentação e Agricultura*, Copenhague-Washington, January-April, 1944-1946. Report from Newton de Castro Belleza to Oswaldo Aranha, 31.05.1943. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. MRE, Álbum 80.1.17, *Conferência de Alimentação e Agricultura*, Copenhague-Washington, January-April, 1944-1946. Report from Newton de Castro Belleza to João Neves da Fontoura, October 1945. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. MRE, Álbum 80.1.17, *Conferência de Alimentação e Agricultura*, Copenhague-Washington, January-April, 1944-1946. Report from Newton de Castro Belleza to João Neves da Fontoura, October 1945. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Castro was a Brazilian physician, expert on nutrition and activist against world hunger. His book *Geopolitics of Hunger* was granted The Franklin D. Roosevelt Foundation Award, in 1952. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. MRE, Álbum 80.1.17, *Conferência de Alimentação e Agricultura*, Copenhague-Washington, January-April, 1944-1946. Report from Newton de Castro Belleza to Samuel de Sousa Leão Gracie, 30.10.1946. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)