

## **Fragmentation of the Brazilian Communist Party (Partido Comunista Brasileiro) and the dissidence brought about by Carlos Marighella**

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**Abstract:** This article aims to succinctly discuss the ideological conflicts inside the Brazilian Communist Party (Partido Comunista Brasileiro) as well as point the main events leading up to it, ranging from Nikita Krushchev's delations of the crimes committed by Stalin to the defragmentation of the party into several left-wing organizations that fought against the military dictatorship - some even engaging in armed guerilla actions. One of the most notorious groups of this period was the one led by Carlos Marighella, the National Liberation Action (Ação Libertadora Nacional).

**Keywords:** Partido Comunista Brasileiro, Brazilian Communist Party, left-wing Brazil, Carlos Marighella.

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### **1. Introduction**

The fragmentation of the Brazilian Communist Party (Partido Comunista Brasileiro / PCB) was a significant event when trying to comprehend the subsequent pulverization of a previously solid party into several ideological groups, some of which even engaged in armed combat against the 1964 Brazilian military dictatorship. This article will briefly discuss the internal events leading up to such conflict and dissidence. One of the events factored in this paper is accusations made by Nikita Krushchev, secretary-general of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). Also relevant were the ensuing disagreements inside the PCB regarding which political action should follow these accusations, with opposing views ranging from pacific conciliation with the ruling bourgeoisie (reformist action) to revolution through armed conflict (revolutionary action).

Analyzing these events, we will then discuss the emergence of the largest and most significant armed conflict group to arise - as per historians of this period - the National Liberation Action (ALN), led by Carlos Marighella.

### **2. Krushchev's report, reformists and conservatives**

In his book *Fighting in the Dark*, Jacob Gorender shows the trajectory of the Brazilian left wing before and after the military dictatorship. He describes the accusations made by Nikita Krushchev's 20<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956 as having greatly upset the global communist movement. The author states that "PCB was one of the most deeply affected parties." After this incident, a line of dissidence was drawn around militant Agildo Barata inside the PCB. Although he played a large role in the insurrection of October 1930 in the state of Paraíba<sup>1</sup> and in the uprising against the Third Infantry Regiment of November 1935<sup>2</sup>, Gorender states that "Agildo Barata was a petit-bourgeois radical who was never even a Marxist."

As a PCB member, Jacob Gorender condemned the fission created by Barata because it "dissolved Marxism into nationalist ideology and eliminated the need for an independent workers' party." On the other hand, the author states that the nationalist-liberal split brought about by Agildo revived Stalinist<sup>3</sup> exponents within PCB and that, at that moment, both himself and Mario Alves - also a member of the party - fought against Stalinism and in favor of developing a new line of politics that went back to the essential Marxist aspects.

Such a change was unimaginable to PCB's executive committee members such as Diogenes Arruda, Joao Amazonas e Mauricio Grabois. Yet another issue was secretary-general Luis Carlos Prestes, who, according to Gorender, was as Stalinist as the rest of the party's high directors. In *Carlos Marighella: the*

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<sup>1</sup>This insurrection took place within the context of the 1930 Revolution, which marked the beginning of the long Getulio Vargas period.

<sup>2</sup>This was part of the Communist Uprising of 1935 movement, which sought to depose the military-led Getulio Vargas government in the name of the National Liberation Alliance (Aliança Nacional Libertadora - ANL) and with support from the Brazilian Communist Party (PCB).

<sup>3</sup>Stalinism refers to the authoritarian regime led by Josef Stalin in the Soviet Union between 1927 and 1953.

*military dictatorship's number one enemy*, Emiliano Jose stated that Diogenes Arruda Camara was sent to represent PCB in CPSU's 20<sup>th</sup> Congress in the Soviet Union in February but that after that Diogenes traveled through a few European capitals as well as China; he returned to Brazil in August 1956. Although he knew that Nikita Krushchev's report was true, Arruda made his stand with PCB's top committee, which was conservative and Stalinist.

In *Marighella: The guerrillero who set the world on fire*, journalist Mario Magalhaes describes the moment when the accusations made at 20<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union made their way inside PCB. Carlos Marighella's first reaction was to accuse *The State of São Paulo* (O Estado de São Paulo) newspaper of deceiving the public. According to Magalhaes, the subsequent confirmation of the veracity of Nikita Krushchev's report deeply troubled Carlos Marighella's feelings and convictions, as he admired Stalin. When the seed of criticism and freedom of opinion germinated inside PCB, Luis Carlos Prestes issued a message in the form of a decree in November 1956:

Attacks made toward the Soviet Union and the CPSU, the bastions of socialism in the world and the party that heads the dissemination of socialism, shall not be admissible in any shape or form within our ranks or through any form of press that is issued with our people's resources (MAGALHAES, p.235, 2012).

Magalhaes states that inside PCB those who stood with Agildo Barata were henceforth called "reformists," and they opposed the high-ranking party members dubbed "conservatives." According to the author, Marighella considered abandoning the party but then drew closer to the "reformist" view. The author further remarks on Marighella's behavior as he began dispensing advice and words of encouragement to peers that had been shaken up by the aforementioned accusations against Josef Stalin.

### **3. The pre-coup movement, between the pacific route and armed combat**

In 1964, the government of Brazilian President Joao Goulart enjoyed a certain amount of support from PCB; this support came from the members who believed in the pacific route, such as Luis Carlos Prestes and Giocondo Dias. According to Emiliano Jose, inside PCB many members already favored armed combat at this point and believed in neither reconciliation with the progressive bourgeoisie nor in the pacific route. Carlos Marighella, Joaquim Camara Ferreira, Jacob Gorender and Mario Alves opposed Prestes and Dias in their ideology. It is plausible that, in the pre-coup period the more radical left-wing ideology was a product of the increasingly swift armament race taking place within the conservative right-wing section of the population.

Conservatives were both arming themselves and setting up training camps. In the state of Goias, titleholders to large amounts of land were armed to the teeth and ready, or so they said, to face workers; they were even said to have the Brazilian army's support. In the state of Pernambuco, the president of the Sugarcane Supply Association, Francisco Falcao, stated that Brazil was already engaged in a revolutionary war and that all they wanted from the State Commercial Association was money for weapons. In Alagoas, a private army of 10,000 men that was assisted by the CIA was ready for action. Meanwhile, the Brazilian army held guerilla training camps all over the country to help those who wanted to fight against the oncoming coup. Armed combat was not a left-wing idea and the left-wing movement was not ready for it; however, that could not be said of the right-wing movement. (JOSE, p.196, 1997).

In his book *Military Dictatorship, the left and society* Daniel Aarão Reis stated that President Joao Goulart – who went back and forth between reconciliation with bourgeois and foreign interests and the social reform demanded by the left wing – directed the movement towards the base reforms in March 1964. Consequently, the conservative right sped up the articulation of the Military Coup, which was deployed in the following month. Before that, an assembly that gathered 350 thousand people had been held on March 13<sup>th</sup> 1964 to discuss the reformative actions demanded by the left. Reis remarks on the proposals discussed in the assembly, such as the exaltation of reforms and decrees which would expropriate private refineries and pave the way for agrarian reform, even with the possibility of expropriating unproductive lands along the railroad axis<sup>4</sup>. Reis states that "the reaction was immediate." On March 19<sup>th</sup>, right-wing conservatives held the first March of

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<sup>4</sup>This region is located in the northern part of the state of Maranhao and it is comprised of approximately 5.2 thousand km<sup>2</sup>. The area is intersected by the Ferro Carajas Road, the Transnordestina Railroad and Highways BR 222 and BR 135.

the Family with God for Freedom in the state of São Paulo. Reis remarks on how swiftly the military coup was deployed and on the “disappearance” of Joao Goulart from public politics from that moment on.

Joao Goulart left the public politics scene in spurts: Brasilia, Porto Alegre, Montevideo, leaving in his wake disorientation and fragmentation. Terrified of the fire that he had started without meaning to and horrified of a possible civil war he did not want, he decided not to decide and left History through the Uruguay border. The left did not offer any resistance, save for isolated groups that were dispersed without much effort. They were betting all their chips on Joao Goulart’s military device and on the president himself (REIS, p.33, 2000).

The military coup took place on April 1<sup>st</sup>, when the right wing celebrated their victory on the streets with a March of the Family with God for Liberty. This march took place in the city of Rio de Janeiro and was comprised of hundreds of thousands of people. Reis states that “without knowing exactly what was to come, the country plunged into the long night of its Military Dictatorship.

#### **4. The OLAS Conference, Carlos Marighella’s exit from PCB and the emergence of ALN**

In *Blood Baptism*, Friar Betto writes about Marighella’s trip to Cuba as this trip was not supported by PCB. Carlos Marighella went to Havana to take part in the OLAS (Organization for Latin American Solidarity<sup>5</sup>) Conference. Betto states that “Brazil was represented by a small delegation.” PCB’s Central Committee sent a telegraphed message to the Cuban Communist Party stating that Marighella was not authorized to represent the party and threatening him with expulsion from the party in case of disobedience. Carlos Marighella replied PCB’s Central Committee with a letter.

I am obviously here without asking for the Central Committee’s permission, firstly because I have not granted the power to tell me what I must or must not do to any revolutionary authority in this committee... The divergences I have had with the Executive Committee, from which I have already departed on a prior date, are the same I have with the Central Committee. Such a committee, directed in a burdensome manner and with little to no possibility of mobility, not to mention being corrupted by bourgeois ideology, can do nothing for the revolution. I cannot belong to this sort of Academy of Letters, whose only function seems to be to meet (...). The Central Committee lacks the most important condition for Leninist-Marxist leadership: knowing how to conduct and face ideological battles. Since it cannot do these things, the committee then resorts to constant administrative measures, suspending, withdrawing and expelling militants, apprehending documents and prohibiting the reading of materials it does not agree with. It is the Central Committee of censorship, reprimand, disavowal, believe it or die. (...) In my condition as a communist, which I will never renounce and which cannot be granted or taken away by the Central Committee, since the Communist Party and Marxism-Leninism neither belong to anyone nor can be monopolized by anyone, I will proceed down the path of armed combat, reaffirming my revolutionary beliefs and permanently breaking away from you. (BETTO, p.46, 2006).

After this letter PCB’s Central Committee expelled Carlos Marighella; however, he would not be the only member to leave the party. In the party’s State Conference in São Paulo in May 1967 there were 27 deputies for the São Paulo base cells. Out of these 37 deputies, 33 sided with Carlos Marighella. Betto further states that “almost all the student and worker cells sided with him as well.” According to Friar Betto, Mario Alves, Apolonio de Carvalho and Jacob Gorender also broke away from the party in Rio de Janeiro and subsequently founded the PCBR<sup>6</sup>.

In the book *Brazil: A Biography*, which discusses the deployment of guerilla actions in Brazil, Schwarcz and Starling remark on the inequality of power between left-wing organizations and the State. The authors state that these armed groups “for the most part emerged from the dissidence and fragmentation resulting from the defeat without resistance suffered by the Communist Party in 1964.” Schwarcz and Starling remark on Carlos Marighella’s notoriety in this moment of armed combat. According to the authors, Marighella

<sup>5</sup> This organization was created in Cuba in August, 1967 and was made up by revolutionary and anti-imperialist Latin American groups.

<sup>6</sup> Brazilian Revolutionary Communist Party, founded in 1968.

“bet on urban guerilla and envisioned facing the dictatorial regime with mobile guerilla groups, moving about the country and converging in the South of Para.” In Schwarcz and Starling’s vision, Marighella “founded the largest armed group seeking to oppose the military – the National Liberation Action.”

Journalist Mario Magalhaes states that PCB’s Central Committee expelled Marighella from the party in September 1967 and accused him of practicing petit-bourgeois individualism. In December of that same year, the 5<sup>th</sup> Congress ratified the expulsion of Carlos Marighella, Joaquim Camara Ferreira, Mario Alves, Apolonio de Carvalho, Jacob Gorender, Jover Telles and Miguel Batista. Jacob Gorender himself believed that the National Liberation Action was the most important organization brought about by PCB’s retraction and names Marighella and Camara Ferreira as its main leaders. Gorender states that it is possible to follow the train of thought that shaped the National Liberation Action by reviewing Carlos Marighella’s writings, both signed and unsigned.

## 5. Conclusion

Military dictatorships arose in several Latin American countries between the decades of 1960 and 1980. Brazil was no different, and this period of political oppression lasted approximately twenty years starting in 1964 and ending in 1985. One of the most striking aspects of the Brazilian military regime was the violence that its supposed opposition was met with; censorship, exile, torture, and even disappearances were commonplace. The regime’s agents carried out these atrocities in a matter of fact, as-you-please fashion; they were supported by legal devices put in place to justify and legalize these actions. Guerrilla organizations sprung up to oppose the regime and the lack of democratic avenues through which to fight it. The issues between PCB’s directors and its members was at the root of the appearance of these organizations. We have discussed the relevant historical facts and linked them to the implosion of this party and the appearance of several guerrilla groups, among them the ALN, which was led by Carlos Marighella and stood out in armed combat.

According to Jacob Gorender, public opinion regarded Marighella as the number one public enemy of the Brazilian military dictatorship. Marighella’s story and the way he was violently murdered by the military regime are the topic of the film *Marighella*, based on the book *Marighella: the guerrillero who set the world on fire*, by Mario Magalhaes. The movie was directed by Wagner Moura and released worldwide in 2019. This movie had its release date delayed *sine die* in Brazil for unknown reasons, which generated a sense of unease in public opinion as the country is currently under extreme right-wing government that openly defends the military dictatorship’s crimes.

The study of the recent past of the Brazilian military dictatorship is a very delicate issue and should not be dealt with sarcasm and ironies the current Brazilian president has done in his public speeches. These speeches grotesquely justify the inhumane acts perpetrated against human beings at that time, like disappearances, the torture of political inmates and the passing off of torturers as national heroes.

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