

## Manifesto, May 1930

### Luis Carlos Prestes

*Between 1924 and 1926, Luis Carlos Prestes commanded a group of young, reform-minded military officers, the tenentes, who traversed the Brazilian backlands hoping to stir a popular uprising. Although their mission failed, the tenentes captured the imagination of a public disenchanted with Brazil's traditional oligarchy. Many of these tenentes later resurfaced as members of the Liberal Alliance, the political coalition that seized power in 1930. Quite naturally, the Liberal Alliance sent overtures to the immensely respected Prestes in an effort to gain his endorsement. Prestes, who during his exile had visited Moscow and become a communist, replied with the following manifesto.*

To the suffering proletariat of our cities, to the workers oppressed by plantations and ranches, to the miserable masses of our backlands and very especially to the sincere revolutionaries, to those who are disposed to the struggle and to the sacrifice on behalf of the profound transformation through which we need to pass, these lines are directed.

Stripped of any rhetorical whims, they were written with the principal objective of clarifying and stating in detail my opinion with respect to the revolutionary Brazilian moment, and to show the necessity of a complete modification in the political orientation that we have been following, in order that we might be able to reach the coveted victory.

The last political campaign [the 1930 presidential election] ended adjourned. One more electoral farce, methodically and most carefully prepared by the petty politicians, it was brought to fulfillment with the ingenious competition of many and by a great number of dreamers still not convinced of the uselessness of such efforts.

One more time, the real popular interests were sacrificed and all the people cheaply mystified by an apparently democratic campaign, but which in its depths, was nothing more than the fight between the op-



Rebel soldiers in the 1930 Revolution in the city of Recife. (Robert M. Levine Collection)

posite interests of two oligarchic currents, supported and stimulated by the two greatest imperialisms that enslave us, and to whom the petty Brazilian politicians deliver, with timid feet and hands, the entire Nation.

Making such affirmations, I cannot, however, cease recognizing among the elements of the Liberal Alliance a great number of sincere revolutionaries, on whom, I believe, I can still count in the frank and decided struggle that I now propose against all the oppressors. . . . Despite all this revolutionary demagoguery and despite saying that the liberals would stand up for the revocation of the latest oppressive laws, there was no one within the Liberal Alliance who would protest against the brutal political persecution by which the proletarian associations of the entire Country were victims during the last electoral campaign, and in Rio Grande do Sul itself, during the height of elections, there was initiated the most violent persecution against workers fighting for their own rights. The reactionary proposals of the struggling oligarchies are identical [to those of the Liberal Alliance] . . .

## The Social Question

### *Platform of the Liberal Alliance, 1930*

*Vargas campaigned for the presidency in colorless fashion, as if he expected to lose, but his proposals for change represented a significant new direction for Brazil. In contrast to the incumbent administration—which regarded organized labor as a matter for the police and ignored the plight of the millions of impoverished Brazilians—Vargas's Liberal Alliance, borrowing from the exiled renegades, addressed social problems, as can be seen in this excerpt from their platform. Once the successful October coup seated him as chief of state, moreover, Vargas reorganized the national government, creating new cabinet ministries to carry out some of the promises made while campaigning.*

One cannot negate the existence of a social question in Brazil as one of the problems that will have to be dealt with seriously by public authorities. The little that we have in terms of social legislation either is not applied or only in tiny measures, sporadically, in spite of the promises that have been made by us as signers of the Versailles Treaty and of our responsibilities as members of the International Labor Organization, whose conventions and regulations we fail to observe. . . . The activities of women and children in factories and commercial establishments in every civilized nation are subject to special conditions that we, up to now, unfortunately do not heed. We need to coordinate activities between the states and the federal government to study and adopt measures to create a national Labor Code. Both the urban and rural proletariat require instructional measures, applied to both, to address their respective needs. These measures should include instruction, education, hygiene, diet, housing, protection of women and children, of invalids and old people, credit, salary relief, and even recreation, including sports and artistic culture. It is time to think of creating agricultural schools and

industrial training centers, of making factories and mills safe, bringing sanitation to the countryside, constructing workers' villas, granting vacations, [establishing] a minimum salary, consumer cooperatives, and so forth.