

Volkswagen and the Dictatorship: The German Automaker's Collaboration with the Repression of Workers during the Brazilian Civil-Military Regime

*A Volkswagen e a ditadura: a colaboração
da montadora alemã com a repressão aos
trabalhadores durante o regime civil-militar brasileiro*

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ABSTRACT

The article questions the relationship of Volkswagen and the Brazilian civil-military regime formed after the 1964 coup. We analyze, in particular, the German automaker's collaboration with the regime's repressive apparatus since state surveillance and control agencies were provided with information about the company's workers. We use company sources, documents from security agencies held in public archives, and materials produced by workers and unions, as well as testimonies and reports from truth commissions. The study is part of the discussion of the relationship be-

RESUMO

O artigo problematiza a relação da Volkswagen com a ditadura civil-militar brasileira inaugurada com o golpe de 1964. Analisamos em particular a colaboração da montadora de origem alemã com o aparato repressivo do regime, que contou com o fornecimento de informações sobre os trabalhadores da empresa para os órgãos de vigilância e controle do Estado. Utilizamos fontes da empresa, documentos da repressão sediados em arquivos públicos e materiais produzidos pelos trabalhadores e sindicatos, além de depoimentos e dos relatórios das comissões da verdade. O trabalho se

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tween the business community and the Brazilian dictatorship, indicating the close intersection between large companies and the state apparatus in the period and indeed their insertion in this, which often included collaboration with the State's repressive methods.

Keywords: Employers; Brazilian civil-military dictatorship; Volkswagen; repression of workers

insere nos marcos da discussão sobre a relação do empresariado com a ditadura brasileira, indicando as estreitas imbricação e inserção das grandes empresas junto ao aparelho de Estado no período, o que incluía muitas vezes colaboração com a repressão.

Palavras-chaves: Empresariado; ditadura civil-militar brasileira; Volkswagen; repressão a trabalhadores.

On September 23, 2020, Volkswagen do Brasil announced a deal with the Federal Prosecution Service (Ministério Público Federal – MPF) in which the automaker admitted it had collaborated with the State's apparatus in the repression of its workers during the Brazilian dictatorship. In a conduct adjustment agreement, the company promised to spend R\$ 36 million to compensate former workers whose human rights had been violated during the regime, as well as to financially support memory and research projects and funds related to the violence committed during the dictatorship (G1, 2020). This is the first case of a company being brought to court for crimes associated with repression during the civil-military regime. Although there is evidence that the Volkswagen case was not unique and that other economic groups collaborated with State repression, the case became well-known and advanced because it was based on the statements of former workers who had been subjected to violence, and especially because it was properly supported by extensive documentation which confirmed the company's collusion with the repression agencies.

The case against Volkswagen was put together thanks to the actions of former workers who had been victims of the company's violence in complicity with the repressive system, as well as the actions of activists and the work of the National Truth Commission (Comissão Nacional da Verdade – CNV) and similar commissions at state and municipal levels. The activities of CNV's Work Group 13 (GT 13), which focused on the violations of workers' human rights, were fundamental to raise proof elements. In partnership with researchers and activists from Argentine—where the reparation agenda and memory, truth, and justice policies are more advanced than in Brazil—, they prepared the material presented to the MPF, which brought the case against the company. Therefore, the work of activists from Exchange, Investigation, Study, and Research

(Intercâmbio, Investigações, Estudos e Pesquisas – IIEP), an agency linked to trade union confederations, was decisive. Despite the above, some of the fundamental agents in this process, such as Rosa Cardoso, Sebastião Neto, Adriano Diogo, Adriana Gomes Santos, and Antonio Fernandes Neto were opposed to the final agreement, since, at the very end of the process, social movements and former workers were excluded from the negotiations and the TAC did not include, amongst other demands, the creation of a “Place of Memory of Workers’ Struggles.” This demand had great importance to the group, due to the non-existent initiatives like this in the country (Cardoso et al., 2020).

The purpose of this article is to analyze the actions of Volkswagen do Brasil during the civil-military dictatorship established in Brazil following the 1964 coup, focusing on the company’s collaboration with repressive agencies. For this reason, we used a set of sources consisting of the following items: documents produced by the company, such as the *Família Volkswagen* magazine; material from the repressive agencies, including records and reports produced by Volkswagen and given to the Department of Political and Social Order (Departamento de Ordem Política e Social – DEOPS), afterwards deposited in the Public Archive of the State of São Paulo (APESP); material produced by the National Information Service (Serviço Nacional de Informações – SNI) and available in the agency’s fond in the National Archives; data and information from the National Association of Automobile Manufacturers (Associação Nacional de Fabricantes de Veículos Automotores – ANFAVEA); sources produced by workers, such as the trade union newspaper *Tribuna Metalúrgica*; as well as testimonies given to truth commissions and other channels. Using this varied set of sources, we intended to obtain a diverse perspective, contrasting the official discourse of the company with its practices, which can be perceived through access to the documents prepared by the organization and also by consulting the criticisms and denunciations formulated by workers and trade unionists. With this, we sought to avoid becoming tied to an exclusive type of source or view of the reality and object analyzed.

To consider these intentions, the article is divided into three parts. After these introductory reflections, we analyze the discussion of the relationship between companies and dictatorships in Brazil and Latin America, aiming to understand and provide interpretative and methodological aspects on which to base this article. Then, we contextualize the trajectory of Volkswagen and its actions in Brazil before and during the dictatorship, covering more generic and wide-ranging aspects, such as economic performance and expansion during the regime, as well as some controversies involving the company during this

period. In the following section, we investigate the accusations on the company's collaboration with the repressive system during the Brazilian dictatorship, using reports, sources, and elements that prove the automaker's cooperation with the State repression agencies and the control over its workers at that time. Finally, we present the final conclusions, seeking an analytical synthesis of the problem proposed in the text.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN COMPANIES AND DICTATORSHIPS IN BRAZIL AND LATIN AMERICA

The study of companies and dictatorships in Brazil and Latin America is now an established field of scientific study, counting on an international network of researchers. There are organizations with a similar profile at a national level, a community with an interdisciplinary profile—despite the predominance of historians— and a substantive production of articles and books, especially in Southern Cone countries. Although the theme is now more associated with the History area, the research and analyses carried out regarding this subject were originally circumscribed to the areas of Social and Economic Sciences. Thus, during the Brazilian dictatorship and the period immediately afterwards, authors such as Octavio Ianni (1981), Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1964), Luciano Martins (1968), Renato Raul Boschi (1979), René Armand Dreifuss (1981), Ary Minella (1988), Sebastião Velasco e Cruz (1995), and Maria Antonieta Leopoldi (2000) tried to understand the actions and relations between employers and the regime, observing the political commitment and positioning of these agents in face of the *coup d'état*, the authoritarian practices and the economic policy of the dictatorship¹.

Among all this works about the theme, Dreifuss' work is one that stands out. In our view, his book, derived from his doctoral thesis defended in Glasgow, in 1980, is notable for three fundamental aspects: it uses a very innovative theoretical and conceptual apparatus, to a great extent based on analytical categories and reflections formulated by Antonio Gramsci; its sources, since he had access, in the National Archive, to the documents of the Institute of Social Studies and Research (Instituto de Pesquisas e Estudos Sociais – IPES), an agency with a military/business profile that played a fundamental role in the 1964 coup and in the preparation of the public policy projects and reformulation of the Brazilian capitalist State, implemented after the coup; and, finally, the work's singular contribution on the analysis of the coup and the dic-

tatorship, especially because it goes beyond the strict notion of a simple coup and military regime:

The new State established in 1964 acted, not only in the name of the multinational financial and industrial power bloc (and others associated with it), but also under the command of the power bloc organized by Ipes. *The 1964 State was in fact a classist State* and, above all, governed by a power bloc. [...] In summary, Ipes represented, in an organic way, the power of multinational interests (and those associated with them) with strategic vision transcending interests restricted to specific companies or social groups and capable of formulating political directives that benefitted the entire bloc (Dreifuss, 1981, p. 488 – emphasis added).

The author thus calls attention to the classist profile of the 1964 coup and the political regime inaugurated after. According to his ponderations and reflections, the overthrow of the political system occurred in 1964, and the dictatorship that followed it, had an eminently civil-military, or business-military, sense, considering that the understanding of the coup and the civil-military regime in Dreifuss' work should not be understood as amorphous or generic, but rather as classist, regarding the dominant groups of society.

Dreifuss' work significantly contributed to the studies of companies and the dictatorship in Brazil, helping to increase the knowledge about the role of businessmen in the coup. His book innovated in analytical and conceptual terms on how to understand the historic phenomenon of dictatorship and its main agents and those who drove the political process in the period. Although the studies and debates on the issue were not that intense in the following decades (the 1990s and 2000s), the interest on it started to grow in the second decade of the twenty-first century, mainly because of the impulse generated by the National Truth Commission (CNV) and similar initiatives. After that, a fertile environment was formed for academic research and studies, increasing the knowledge about the dictatorship and the business action during the regime. Thus, studies such as those of Jorge José de Melo (2012), Pedro Campos (2014), João Braga Arêas (2015), Martina Spohr (2020), Elaine Bortone (2018), Rafael Moraes (2018), Marcelo Almeida de Carvalho Silva (2018), Ana Carolina Reginatto Moraes (2019), Ana Beatriz Barros da Silva (2019), Viviane Magalhães (2019), Elisandra Galvão (2020), Marlon Marques (2020), and Richard Martins (2020), amongst many others, significantly helped to better understand the role of the business class during the dictatorship. The role of these agents in the coup was to a good extent covered by Dreifuss' research;

however, the same cannot be said about the dictatorial regime itself, which lasted more than 20 years.

It was not only in Brazil that this discussion flourished. It has figured in other countries in a more mature manner, both regarding the volume and scope of research and the consolidation of research methods, as well as in public memory policies and legal actions against the economic groups that cooperated with State terror. In Latin America, the country with the greatest critical mass and experience on this agenda is Argentina, which has a large and high-quality production in this area. What marked this process was the publication of the book *Cuentas Pendientes* in 2013, edited by Juan Pablo Bohoslavsky and Horacio Verbitsky. This collection contained a series of texts by various academic and activist authors, covering the different levels and dimensions of “economic complicity with dictatorship”. According to Bohoslavsky (2013), the dictatorship had a structural legitimacy deficit counterbalanced by purchasing the loyalty of entrepreneurs and agents of repression, such as the military and police officers. The same author has edited similar books about the Uruguayan (Bohoslavsky, 2016) and Chilean dictatorships (Bohoslavsky; Fernández; Smart, 2019), contributing greatly to the development of studies and actions agenda in those two countries. As well as these books, some recent works have sought to develop an international and comparative analysis, establishing similarities and differences in the relations between entrepreneurs and dictatorships established in Latin America during the Cold War.²

In Argentina, debate around this issue is so advanced that recently an extensive report was published advocating a method for establishing business responsibility for the violation of human rights during periods of dictatorship:

This document studies the responsibility of part of the national and foreign business sector on the violations of human rights during the last Argentine dictatorship. It does so through the examination of a range of business practices of repression of workers in companies in various parts of the country. The evidence collected and analyzed in a set of cases, limited in number but very significant due to their economic importance, allows us state that, in the territory of manufacturing establishments, the actions of the Armed Forces were efficiently combined with business actions to exercise repressive power against workers. This articulation, embodied in the Army guidelines that showed a common concern with the conflict between capital and labor, formed part of the strategy of large companies, which put into play a wide variety of repressive practices, including the provision of information, as well as logistical and material resources to the

repressive forces and the establishment of clandestine detention centers within factories, amongst others. These practices, both due to their own characteristics, and because they were part of a web of State terrorism when linked to the events in which workers were victims, have been configured as crimes against humanity (Argentina, 2016, p. 1)³.

The book contains a series of case studies showing how companies such as Ford, Mercedes-Benz, Swift, Fiat, and Loma Negra, amongst others, collaborated with State repression. Written by historians and other specialists, the study has a rigorous work method, observing the cooperation of companies with repressive agencies and the crimes committed by them, such as the use of company facilities for illegal detention and torture. With the use of documentary sources attesting these practices, the report indicates the responsibility of companies for human rights violations against workers who were the victims of abuses during the dictatorship in the country.

As will be addressed later, the elements indicated by Argentine researchers had a strong similarity with what was practiced by Volkswagen during the Brazilian dictatorship, allowing a debate about the responsibility of the company for the crimes committed against its employees. However, before analyzing the violations committed by the automaker, it is important to understand its history and actions in Brazil.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF VOLKSWAGEN'S TRAJECTORY IN GERMANY AND BRAZIL⁴

Volkswagen is now the largest automaker in the world, fighting for leadership in the global market with the Japanese company Toyota and surpassing the annual production of vehicles by Ford, GM, Peugeot, Fiat, and other large international automakers (Terra, 2020). Although it appears on top of the ranking of one of the most important industrial segments in the international economy, the Volkswagen group has a controversial history⁵.

The company was formed in the 1930s as an initiative of the National Socialist German Worker's Party, which asked the Austrian engineer Ferdinand Porsche to develop an automobile which was practical, economic, popular, and cheap, a "people's car". The Volkswagen project was thus born with the Beetle, produced in the company's factory, whose construction began in 1937. In the following year, the industrial plant began to manufacture its first automobiles. Inspiration for the factory unit drew on the production line method established

in the Ford factory in Detroit in the 1910s, which in turn inspired the establishment of similar industrial units in other places in the world in the 1930s, such as the Soviet Union (Huberman, 1986 [1936]). During the war, its factory in Wolfsburg was adapted to the war effort and forced labor was used. Evidence has been found that 20,000 forced laborers worked in the Volkswagen factory (Silva, 2018). Volkswagen was not the only company with a history associated with Nazism; other German companies also were (Vuillard, 2019), as others from other countries, such as IBM, from the U.S. (Black, 2001).

The company was not dismantled after the war and German state capital continued to be essential. It expanded after the conflict and was one of the symbols of the “German miracle”, exporting cars all over Europe in 1948. Its first foreign factory was in Brazil, seen as the most promising Latin American market after a visit by a Volkswagen director to the region. In 1953, a unit was opened in Brazil, which imported parts and assembled the Beetle (known as the *Fusca*) and the Kombi van. To establish itself in the country, the German group made a partnership with the Monteiro Aranha family, who held 20% of the capital of Volkswagen do Brasil, with the rest of the capital being under the control of the company in Germany. Due to the incentives provided by the Kubitschek administration to establish factories and nationalize the production of automobiles, Volkswagen received a series of incentives, such as fiscal exemptions, currency exchange guarantees, and funding facilitated by BNDE (the Banco Nacional de Desenvolvimento Econômico – a Brazilian bank) to establish a complete industrial complex in Brazil. Based on the privileges conceded to foreign capital under Instruction No. 113 from the Superintendency of Currency and Credit of Banco do Brasil, known as SUMOC (Ianni, 1986), in 1957 the German automaker established an industrial unit in São Bernardo do Campo, in the São Paulo metropolitan region (Silva, 2020).

Upon the opening of its factory, the company became a market leader in Brazil, a position maintained throughout the dictatorship. With a transport model that privileged highways, the elimination of railway lines, the construction of new roads and incentives for the automobile industry, the military regime saw industrial activity in the country grow significantly during its more than two decades, notably the sector which produced durable goods, the leading light of which was the manufacture of automobiles. ANFAVEA data (2014) indicates that the automobile structure as a whole corresponded to 13% of Brazilian GDP in 1966, and 20.6% in 1975. Volkswagen was the largest automaker in the country and was responsible for 42% of the Brazilian production of vehicles and 51% of automobiles in 1966. Five years later, these figures were

57% and 64%, respectively. The company built two new factories and bought companies, such as Vemag and Chrysler do Brasil. In 1979 alone, it produced 475,000 vehicles, a record for the company in the country, a mark only surpassed in 1995 (Silva, 2018). In the 1970s, Volkswagen do Brasil was the largest private company in the country, larger than any Brazilian company and only inferior in terms of revenue than state companies, such as Petrobras (Kopper, 2020). In this period, the activities of the automaker corresponded to approximately 1% of Brazilian GDP (Dodt; Aders, 2017).

However, the company's success was not absolute. It was involved in a series of controversies in this period. In the 1970s, it diversified its activities and established other forms of business, such as creating and running ranches in the Amazon region. On one of these, called Cristalino, agro-industrial experiments were carried out marked by accusations of serious socio-environmental impacts, as well as the use of forced labor (Acker, 2014).

Moreover, in its official magazine, *Família Volkswagen*, the company was not only uncritical of the dictatorship and its arbitrariness, but also endorsed the jingoistic discourse used by the regime. The company thus held ceremonies with the presence of governmental authorities, such as the celebration of the production of one million automobiles in Brazil by the group, in 1970. The global president of the company, Kurt Lotz, the Mayor of São Paulo, Paulo Maluf, the state governor, Abreu Sodré, the commander of the II Army, General Canavarro Pereira, the former minister Roberto Campos, and other ministers representing the dictator Emílio Garrastazu Médici participated in this event (Anfavea, 2016).

Another controversy was related to the fact that, in 1967, it was discovered that the Brazilian subsidiary of the German automaker employed Franz Paul Stangl, a Nazi war criminal responsible for concentration camps during the Second World War, who was based in Treblinka and involved in the death of thousands of people there. Stangl was in charge of the worker control sector in Volkswagen do Brasil and was responsible for building a worker surveillance system, involving dozens of people, above all soldiers and police officers. After being discovered, Stangl was extradited to West Germany, where he was condemned to life in prison in 1971, dying of a heart attack six months after being sentenced (Abal, 2017).

As well as employing a Nazi war criminal, the company collaborated with the repressive system by lending cars to Operation Bandeirantes (OBAN), an initiative that sought to persecute those involved in armed resistance to the dictatorship using methods such as illegal detentions, torture, and the assass-

sination of regime opponents. Volkswagen was one of the companies which cooperated with Oban, as well as Folha de S. Paulo, Ford, Supergel, and Ultragás, amongst other economic groups that supported the state terrorism policies of the Brazilian dictatorship (Gaspari, 2002).

However, the greatest of the controversies involving the company and its relationship with the dictatorship was related to its collaboration with the repressive apparatus of the regime. This also provided the motive for the lawsuit taken against the automaker.

VOLKSWAGEN AND THE REPRESSION OF WORKERS DURING THE DICTATORSHIP

Due to the company's expansion during the dictatorship, favored by policies encouraging road transport and the expansion of the urbanization process, the automaker increased both its directly employed labor force and the number of workers in its factories. Overall, in 1966, the company had a total of 50,000 employees, which had grown to 150,000 by 1975 (Silva, 2018).

Like the working class as a whole during the dictatorship (Negro, 2004), Volkswagen's workers suffered from wage restraint, the loss of rights, and repressive practices. Company workers were especially harmed by the end of stability based on time of service in private companies during the Castelo Branco administration (1964-1967). Since its factory had been established in 1957, various workers gained stability in the second half of the 1960s, but they did not have this right guaranteed, due to the mini-labor reform carried out by the dictatorship, which extinguished this conquest and created the Guarantee Fund for Time of Service (Fundo de Garantia por Tempo de Serviço – FGTS)⁶. Due to the decisive participation of foreign groups and companies associated with international capital in the 1964 coup and in the first dictatorial administration, there are indications that a fundamental target of the measure was undermining the stability of employees of multinational companies, which had established themselves in the country during the Kubitschek administration (1956-1961). The historian Christian Kopper, who had access to Volkswagen's internal documents, indicates that the company celebrated the initial measures of the dictatorship, such as the end of stability of workers in the private sector, the prohibition of strikes, and other measures that favored employers (Kopper, 2020).

Similarly, as occurred with other workers during the dictatorship,

Volkswagen's workers suffered from pay rises, which were lower than inflation, based on distorted indices in relation to the real cost of living. Elsewhere, as in other sectors of the economy, the German multinational took advantage of facilitations granted by the government to make its employees do overtime, with the calculation of the extra hour payment owed being linked to the payment of holidays, the so-called 13th monthly salary, and FGTS. In the 1970s, the company accumulated a total of 300,000 overtime hours per month. The more the exploitation of the labor force intensified, the more factory workers productivity increased. A Volkswagen employee was responsible for the manufacture of 6.6 cars per year in 1968. This figure jumped to 10.53 in 1973 and 11.86 in 1976. Although the data suggests this resulted from a more rational use of human labor and the introduction of technological innovations in the productive system, a large part of this increase in productivity was due to greater exploitation of the labor force and the use of artifices such as overtime (Silva, 2018; Singer, 1976).

Finally, public health, hygiene, and security conditions within factories were questioned by workers. The official discourse of the company went in the opposite sense. In its magazine *Família VW*, the company alleged that care with workers' health was the responsibility of the medical sector, "the sector of maximum importance within the system of human relations adopted by Volkswagen do Brasil in favor of peace and social justice" (Volkswagen, 1964, p. 7). The company stated that it maintained suitable hygiene conditions in the working environment, seeking to contribute to "a greater social-medical balance, eliminating possible causes of diseases; treating diseases and always orienting better working conditions." (Volkswagen, 1963, p. 3).

Despite the idyllic scenario designed by the automaker, this was not the perception of the workers. The trade union newspaper *Tribuna Metalúrgica* denounced that in the factory workers were exposed to irritating gases, acid mists, dust from glass wool, and other materials which caused "wheezing in the lungs, bronchitis, weakness, lack of air, coughs, or too much phlegm." (Sindicato..., 1980, pp. 4-5). In addition to the respiratory impacts, work in the industrial plant affected vision: "Eyesight gets weak, and workers could even become blind when working in badly lit places (...); the radiating heat from the foundries can cause cataracts" (Sindicato..., 1980, pp. 4-5). Finally, the report "We are not machines!" from the workers' newspaper pointed out the weakness caused by the long working days:

How often do we leave work, after 12 hours, with a headache, tired, unwilling even to talk to our wives and children, and instead of blaming the working conditions to which we are subjected, we prefer to call our wives and children annoying, and say they annoy us when we want to sleep (Sindicato..., 1980, pp. 4-5).

It is thus possible to contrast the official discourse of the company about the medical, sanitary, and safety conditions of the work environment with the reports of workers, who pointed to the precariousness of the assistance given by the company to its employees, causing them health problems and fatigue.

In relation to safety, once again what occurred in Volkswagen's productive units shared many similarities with the general situation of workers in the country. Thus, at a period when Brazil was the world leader in work accidents (Silva, 2019), these were also recurrent in the automaker's factories. In the first half of 1970, workers reported the death of five workers in the São Bernardo units due to work accidents. This appeared in a pamphlet found by the company and sent to DEOPS, in which is stated: "three workers died crushed by the press. A worker died as a result of the explosion of a tank. And another died burned to death after setting himself on light with alcohol." (A Volkswagen vista..., 1970). The company appeared to act like others in the period, being lax regarding the care for the safety of its workers, economizing on the provision of safety materials, and abusing overtime, which left workers more tired and more prone to accidents, numerous in the period.

The document cited above is also representative of another phenomenon verified in the period in the company's relationship with the state apparatus, related to the collaboration of the company with the repressive apparatus during the dictatorship. As can be seen, it was obtained in APESP. This occurred because Volkswagen's Department of Industrial Security cooperated with the São Paulo State Department of Social and Political Order (DEOPS). As well as passing on pamphlets such as the one mentioned, the company created files on its workers with their personal information, such as full names, photos, parents' names, physical characteristics, identification document numbers, how long they had worked in the company, and political activities workers participated in, including engagement in unions, involvement in strikes, and distribution of pamphlets.

Figure 1 – Example of record provided by Volkswagen to DEOPS about a company employee:

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NOME: IDALÉCIO CUSTÓDIO DA SILVA X CUMP: 15511 SINDIC: 1590
 CARGO: Operador de máquinas SALARIO: R\$. 1.66 7/12.
 VILARJO: PAI Pedro P. Jesus M. Maria Fa. Jesus FIC. Bras.
 ENDEREÇO: Rua Irenê FIC. Bras.
 BAIRRO: Vila Apiani N.º: 274 CIDADE: Santo André-SP
 LOCAL FÁB. Paraituba FIC. Bras. DATA NASC. 28/12
 ESTADO CIVIL: Casado DATA ADM: 18-12-62 ALGUMA: 1,58 CCR: Branco
 CARTHEIRA DE IDENTIDADE: Título de Eleitor, nº 69.934 2/
 CARTHEIRA PROFISSIONAL: 69.369. 2/65

OBS: Foi surpreendido com panfletos e jornais subversivos em sua posse quando voltar ao trabalho em data de 15-01-70, será observado

V. 70





21 70
 502 70 814

Source: Fichas de trabalhadores..., 1970.

The record is one of many prepared by the company and sent to police and security agencies. The above document was prepared because the worker Idalécio Custódio da Silva had been surprised and caught with “subversive newspapers and pamphlets” and it says that this worker must be “observed”. It is important to highlight that in these documents the company assumed a tone

of combatting and aversion to “subversion,” typical of the regime’s discourse in the period.

It is interesting to note how in Volkswagen—as in many other companies—, the agents responsible for internal security and vigilance over workers had a military background. Thus in 1970, Major Ademar Rudge was the company’s head of industrial security and met with a DEOPS agent in the factory, handing him documents from the automaker with reports about the political activities of its employees. DEOPS made a report of this visit:

The officer in question, provided our agent with a report he had written on the subject, together with individual photos and records of those suspected of having links with the distribution of this newspaper and subversive pamphlets (*Relatório da visita...*, 1976).

It is significant that in this document the representative of the German multinational is not referred to by DEOPS as a company employee, but as an ‘officer,’ or better, as an army officer working within a private company. This supports the notion of the non-discontinuity between the company and the state, and more specifically between automaker’s system of vigilance and control over its workers and the repressive apparatus of the dictatorship.

Amongst the many partnerships between Volkswagen’s internal security system and the police and repressive apparatus of the dictatorship, the most notable one is the dismantling of a cell of the Brazilian Communist Party (*Partido Comunista Brasileiro – PCB*) at the beginning of the 1970s. At that moment, the party was working in the grassroots of trade unions and popular representations, which did not involve the use of armed actions. Due to this choice, various dissident groups withdrew in the party and formed organizations that carried out armed actions against the dictatorship (Gorender, 1987). The party was active among Volkswagen’s workers, which was duly identified by the company itself and by the regime’s repressive agencies, as became evident in this document from the São Paulo Deops, in 1971:

At the beginning of the third quarter [of 1971], the emphasis given by the Brazilian Communist Party (PCB) to the work of “Company Committees” to the detriment of action in trade unions was still clear [...]. It has now been found that part of the party encourages union infiltration [...] However, the PCB does not neglect to create its grassroots organizations (GO) in companies. One of these GOs was identified in Volkswagen do Brasil, in SÃO BERNARDO DO CAMPO/

SP, formed by 32 activists, which had been developing an intense work of enlistment in that industry. (Célula do PCB..., 1971).

As can be noticed, the dictatorship's police managed to find the PCB cell among the Volkswagen workers and identified the party strategy of forming company committees and afterwards infiltrating unions.

Even the National Information Service (SNI) monitored the PCB's work among the Volkswagen workers. On 21 July 1971, the agents found a pamphlet entitled "How to build the party in large companies". The following phrase could be found in the document: "our action is carried out in a large imperialist company, with thousands of workers [and] only after 1964 did we manage to have four comrades in our company". The pamphlet also indicated the expansion of the cell within Volkswagen: "[...] one comrade [...] began by meeting with four or five workers at lunchtime and a while later would have more than one hundred." (Arquivo Nacional, 1971). Lúcio Antonio Bellentani, a PCB activist and Volkswagen employee, referred in his statement to the Municipal Truth Commission of São Paulo to the party's cell in the automaker when it was dismantled by the joint action of the automaker and the regime's repressive forces: "at that time, the party's base within Volkswagen consisted of approximately 250 people" (CMV, 2012, p. 49).

The director general of the DEOPS police of São Paulo sent a document to the São Paulo state secretary for security on August 7, 1972, in which he admitted collaboration with Volkswagen and the monitoring of the political action of the company's workers:

This department has been carrying out for a long time investigations focused on the action of the Brazilian Communist Party in large companies, which followed already prepared plans. We were aware that the automobile industries would be targeted, including Volkswagen [sic], which also led to rapport between this direction and security elements of the mentioned Company (Entrosamento entre a Polícia..., 1972).

This document reveals and proves the collaboration of the company with the state's repressive agencies. In addition to the records and reports given to DEOPS by the company, the report corroborates the actions of the German multinational in collusion with the dictatorship's security agencies.

All of this surveillance and monitoring preceded the decisive moment of repression in partnership with Volkswagen. Between July 28 and August 8, 1972, the police arrested six Volkswagen workers: Amauri Danhone, Annemarie

Buschel, Antonio Torini, Geraldo Castro del Pozzo, Henrich Plagge, and Lucio Antonio Bellentani. According to Bellentani's report, Volkswagen did not just provide information about and denunciations of the political activities of its workers. It also offered its facilities for the detention of workers and for their torture. He told the Municipal Truth Commission that he was "[...] arrested within the Volkswagen factory. I was working and two individuals arrived with machine guns, which they jabbed into my back, when I was already handcuffed, this was around 11 p.m., something like that. When I reached the security room of Volkswagen, the torture began. I started being beaten there, I was slapped, punched. They wanted to know if there was anyone else involved with the party in Volkswagen." (CMV, 2012, p. 49). On the day after his arrest, the Bellentani case was taken over by *Delegado* Sergio Paranhos Fleury, responsible for Operation Bandeirantes. According to Bellentani, "that was when the heavy stuff began, I mean the *pau-de-arara*—the parrot's perch—, they broke some of those wooden truncheons on my head, my hands, my feet; I lost some teeth. It was like this for around 45 days." (CMV, 2012, p. 49). In a documentary recorded for the German television network in 2017, Bellentani gave more details about the torture he suffered: "they got an electric wire, they tied one part here [making a gesture as if he was winding the wire in the right ear] and the other in the penile channel. Then they started giving me shocks. And in this position [indicating the position in which he was hung by his arms and legs] that basin was formed here in the stomach, to increase the sensation of shock they threw water on it. All the time hitting me in the head, the face, kicks..." (Dodt; Aders, 2017).

Bellentani was imprisoned for 40 days without his family knowing his whereabouts or if he was alive. Another Volkswagen employee who was arrested, José Miguel, was detained for six months in DOI-Codi (Detachment of Information Operations – Center of Internal Defense Operations / Destacamento de Operações de Informação - Centro de Operações de Defesa Interna) and another eight months in the facilities of Cenimar (Navy Information Center – Centro de Informações da Marinha). Volkswagen not only kept its workers under surveillance when the company employed them, it also monitored them after they left the company. An internal document from 1974 sent to DEOPS, shows that the enterprise directors followed the trial of six former workers in the Military Supreme Court (STM). The document sent to the agencies of repression indicates that the workers were condemned by the "STM for practices of subversion" (Condenação de Seis..., 1974).

The dismantling of the PCB cell at the peak of the dictatorship was prob-

ably the greatest case of collaboration between Volkswagen and the repressive apparatus of the civil-military dictatorship. However, there were other events when this partnership with the dictatorial regime reappeared. During the 1978, 1979, and 1980 strikes, Volkswagen kept its workers under intense surveillance and control, providing data to the police agencies. In the DEOPS archives in APESP there are 222 bulletins prepared by Volkswagen do Brasil with records of occurrences during the strikes of that time. The trade union denounced the company's action. In this way, in 1978, after the holding of the III Metallurgical Congress, trade unionists denounced that the company had dismissed 11 employees who had participated in the strike, according to *Tribuna Metalúrgica* (Sindicato..., 1978). During the strikes, the automaker sought to isolate the workers, even cutting telephone lines and putting armed guards at the entrance to the main production areas and the tool shops (Humphrey, 1982). Volkswagen threatened the strikers with arrest and drafted "blacklists" or "dirty lists" with the names of the workers involved in trade union and "subversive" activities and in strikes, giving these lists to the repressive agencies and to other companies from the area (Silva, 2018; Ianni, 1981).

Obviously, these practices of association with repression and providing police agencies with information were not exclusive to Volkswagen, especially in relation to the monitoring of political and trade union activities of workers in the peak of strikes at the end of the 1970s and beginning of the 1980s. Recently, an extensive report was produced about the collaboration of Fiat's factory with the repressive agencies in Minas Gerais, in the workers political actions during the strikes at the end of the 1970s (The Intercept, 2019). Similar to what occurred with Volkswagen, the documents that proved the collusion of the Italian automaker with the police and repressive apparatus were found in the Public Archive of Minas (Arquivo Público Mineiro - APM).

CONCLUSION

Given what has been presented above, we can make some final considerations about what the collaboration of Volkswagen with the repression during the Brazilian dictatorship meant.

The documents presented, in what they contain and even in the photo, seem to show that there was significant collaboration between Volkswagen do Brasil and the agencies of state terrorism during the Brazilian civil-military dictatorship. In preparing files and records of their workers, monitoring their political and trade union activities and giving DEOPS these documents, the

company proposed its infamous cooperation with the political police of the authoritarian regime, monitoring its workers and providing the repressive agencies with this data. From the reports of former workers, the collusion was even more intense and involved illegal detention within the factory and the same practices of torture of the company's employees within the industrial plant of Volkswagen in São Bernardo do Campo. Given these elements and considerations, it seems proven that the company cooperated with the dictatorship's authoritarian and repressive policy and was also responsible for the violations of the human rights of its workers during that period.

The episodes analyzed point to impressive characteristics and aspects. DEOPS not only admitted the collaboration with the automaker's Department of Industrial Security, it also had a section headed by a trained military officer, who had open doors and channels in the police and the repressive spheres of the dictatorship. Moreover, in the records it prepared, the company adopted the typical language and vocabulary of repression itself, denouncing to the security agencies that some of its workers held and distributed within the company "subversive" materials. These elements seem to certify a certain non-discontinuity of the company with the dictatorship itself, in particular the internal surveillance system of company employees, which was close to the repressive agencies. There was a fluid transit between both and an identification of the company itself, and its daily bureaucratic practices, with the regime. In this sense, cases such as these seem to prove the business-military nature of the Brazilian dictatorship, amongst the main beneficiaries of which—and those contemplated with the actions and policies of the period—were the owners of the largest private companies in the Brazilian economy. On the one hand, the large employers were the main social segment favored by the regime, on the other, the main victims of the dictatorship who were burdened by its arbitrariness and violence were the workers and the members of the subaltern classes.

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NOTES

¹ We do not intend to present an exhaustive overview of the historiographic production of the relationship of companies and employers with the Brazilian dictatorial regime. For this, see Campos (2020)

² In relation to this, see Basualdo; Berghoff; Bucheli, 2020, as well as the dossier organized by Basualdo and Campos (2020).

³ In the original: “Este documento estudia la responsabilidad que tuvo un sector del empresariado nacional y extranjero en las violaciones a los derechos humanos cometidas durante la última dictadura argentina. Lo hace a partir del examen de un arco de prácticas empresariales de represión a los trabajadores en empresas situadas en distintas regiones del país. La evidencia recogida y analizada en un conjunto de casos, acotados en número pero muy significativos por su importancia económica, permite afirmar que, en el territorio de los establecimientos fabriles, se combinaron con eficacia el accionar de las Fuerzas Armadas y el accionar empresarial para ejercer el poder represivo contra los trabajadores. Dicha articulación, plasmada en directivas del Ejército que manifestaron una común preocupación por la conflictividad entre el capital y el trabajo, formó parte de la estrategia de grandes empresas, que pusieron en juego una amplia variedad de prácticas represivas que incluyeron la entrega de información y el aporte de recursos logísticos y materiales a las fuerzas represivas y la instalación de centros clandestinos de detención en el predio de sus fábricas, entre otras. Estas prácticas, tanto por sus características propias, como porque se insertaban en la trama del terrorismo de Estado al vincularse con los hechos que tuvieron como víctimas a los trabajadores, se configuran como delitos de lesa humanidad.” (Argentina, 2016, p. 1)

⁴ We do not intend to exhaust the question. In relation to the trajectory of the company in the country, as well as of other German companies, see Russau (2017) and Bandeira (2011 [1994]).

⁵ In addition to the controversies involving the company and its original connection with Nazism, other questions involving the group in a more recent period should be emphasized, such as the scheme for defrauding emission tests for polluting gases, known as “diesel-gate”. In relation to this, see Autoesporte, 2017.

⁶ In relation to FGTS, see Ferrante (1978) and Valeriano (2008).

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