

Workers and urban associations during the Jânio Quadros administration in São Paulo (1953-1954)¹

Trabalhadores e associativismo urbano no governo Jânio Quadros em São Paulo (1953-1954)

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RESUMO

O artigo analisa a ação das organizações populares com base territorial, em especial aquelas vinculadas às demandas da população dos bairros operários, durante o curto governo municipal de Jânio Quadros na cidade de São Paulo, político eleito com forte apoio desses movimentos. Partimos, para isso, de uma análise ainda inicial de um *corpus* documental composto por mais de 250 processos, reunindo cartas, pedidos, petições, solicitações e abaixo-assinados encaminhados por Sociedades Amigos de Bairro ao gabinete do prefeito de São Paulo durante a gestão de Quadros nos anos de 1953 e 1954. Nesse sentido, o artigo procura avançar na compreensão do sistema político populista, ressaltando o papel da dimensão urbana na construção das estratégias de trabalhadores e lideranças políticas.

Palavras-chave: trabalhadores; associativismo urbano; Jânio Quadros.

ABSTRACT

This article analyses the activities of popular organizations, particularly those related to working-class neighborhoods, during the short period of Jânio Quadros' administration in São Paulo. Jânio was elected with strong support from these organizations. Based on the analyses of around 250 processes, including petitions, letters and other documents sent by neighborhoods associations to the mayor's office in 1953 and 1954, it aims to explore the populist political system, highlighting the role of the urban dimension in the strategies of workers and political leaders.

Keywords: working-class; urban associations; Jânio Quadros.

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THE OTHER SIDE OF THE FOUR HUNDREDTH ANNIVERSARY

The city was arranged like never before for the party. The preparations for the four hundredth anniversary of the founding of São Paulo in 1954 had captured the imagination of the media, the government, and various social sectors for months on end. After all, the festivities were seen as an unequalled opportunity to project a representation of the city which would reaffirm the pride of 'being *Paulista*' (the name by which those born in the city were known) and the strength and importance of the 'metropole of labor,' the 'locomotive of Brazil.'

The celebrations were supposed to be sufficiently grand for what was said to be the fastest growing city in the world. The economic strength and importance of São Paulo in Brazilian history were repeatedly hammered home in numerous articles in the press, in advertisements, and in official and extra-official discourse. It was not by chance that references to the supposed 'heroes' of the defeated 1932 Constitutionalist Revolution and the images of the *Bandeirantes*, both in the historic construction of the pioneers of the country and the contemporary version of the 'Bandeirantes of industrial progress' were abundant during the commemoration period.²

A good part of the jingoism of *Paulistas* derived from a new and intense wave of industrialization and urbanization experienced by São Paulo city after the Second World War. Between 1945 and 1960 the secondary sector in Brazil grew at an average rate of 9.5% a year, becoming one of the most accentuated processes of industrialization anywhere in the world at this time. In 1959 almost 50% of all factory employment in the country was concentrated in the state of São Paulo, principally in the capital and the surrounding municipalities.³

Equally, the speed of urban growth was impressive. With 1.3 million inhabitants in 1940, the city would witness an unprecedented population increase, reaching 8.5 million inhabitants in 1980, becoming the largest metropole in the country and one of the biggest in the world. In the twenty years which separated 1950 from 1970, for example, the *Paulista* capital tripled in size, with an elevated attraction of internal migrants, especially from the interior of the state, from Minas Gerais, and from the Northeast of Brazil. In the 1950s alone the city received almost one million new inhabitants representing approximately 60% of the municipality's growth during the decade (cf. Berlinck; Hogan, 1972, p.12).

It was this process combined with urban growth and economic vigor which, in the vision of the *Paulista* elites, deserved and needed to be widely

celebrated on the occasion of the 400th anniversary of the city. São Paulo was, according to the advertising of a bank at that time, “the colossal city which the more it worked, the more it grew,... and the more it grew the more it worked.”⁴ A tourist guide, especially prepared for the commemoration of the fourth centenary, reported that after a long period of colonial lethargy, the city, starting at the end of the nineteenth century, “began to wake up from its dream of Sleeping Beauty in the woods of Piratininga and is walking with giant steps with huge boots.” At the beginning of the 1950s, “the *Bandeirante* capital” was already the metropole “which grew fastest, whose population increased the quickest, surpassing the rates of the greatest urban centers on the continent.” “All foreigners who reached *Pauliceia*,” the guide commented, “were amazed to find such a vast metropole” (Guia..., 1954, p.32, 31, 23).

The efforts made to hold festivities which could correspond to this great expectation appear to have been rewarded. Reports about the celebrations are almost unanimous in highlighting the large numbers of ordinary people on the streets of the city during the events which marked the fourth centenary towards the end of the extended week ending on 25 January 1954. The reports highlighted the “profound emotion” and the “uncontained jubilation” of the population:

At midnight exactly all the bells of the city rang out festively, everywhere there could be heard the sound of factory sirens, fireworks exploding, car horns blaring loudly, radios playing commemorative songs, and people on the streets commemorating with great enthusiasm.⁵

The hail of small silver paper triangles market with the symbol of the festivities (the ‘ascendant volute,’ signifying the progress of São Paulo) and the light show in the city center appeared to have been the high point of the festivities. The ‘silver rain,’ as it was known, became engraved in popular memory and until the present day is frequently mentioned by those who remember the festivities. In a site on the internet dedicated to impressions of the city’s history, one contemporary witness described his memories of the night as follows:

Not having completed eleven years of age, I was still a boy in short pants... I was a young boy dazed by what happened on that date. It was 25 January 1954, the sky was starry with thousands of pieces of paper flooding the celestial space, the silver and the lights gave a special magic to everything. Silver paper fell on the ground, spreading emotions through all the kids, including myself. There was euphoria everywhere ...⁶

The lights which were abundant during the festivities were, however, missing from the daily lives of thousands of *Paulistanos* (as the inhabitants of the city were known). On 27 January 1954, two days after the festivities, a certain Heitor Brugnens, director of the Commission of Demands of Talhados and Bartolomeu do Canto streets, linked to *Sociedade de Amigos de Vila Palmeira* (Societies of Friends of Vila Palmeira), in the northern part of the city, wrote to the then mayor, Jânio Quadros, asking him to intervene with the public electricity company, *São Paulo Light and Power*, so that the powerful Canadian company would install lampposts on the streets of this distant neighborhood.⁷

Similarly, in June of the same year, the inhabitants of Vila Independência in Ipiranga, “which has approximately 30,000 inhabitants,” sent the mayor through the intermediation of the local *Sociedade de Amigos* (Society of Friends), a petition asking the city government to make Light install “more lights” on the lampposts already existing in the streets of the district, which would ensure “JUSTICE” would be done by “solving one of the most delicate problems, since a large number of workers, young girls, and men, suffer all kinds of dangers, from accidents to robberies.”⁸ In addition, the president of the Society of Friends of Vila Ipojuca, in Lapa, stating that he represented the will of the neighborhood’s residents, sent Mayor Jânio, on 1 September 1954, various requests for public lighting in local streets.⁹

These letters, requests, and petitions sent to the city government of São Paulo by the so-called *Sociedades Amigos de Bairro* (SABs – Societies of Friends of Neighborhoods), a form of residents’ association which proliferated at the beginning of the 1950s, reveal much about São Paulo at the time of its four hundredth anniversary, the city of workers, of old industrial neighborhoods, and new and needy peripheral ones, distant from the progress propagated by its elites. They also reveal much about the perception of those from below of the urban and industrial growth in the city at that time. They are, thus, privileged sources for understanding the logic and the repertoires of organization and popular action, as well as the dynamics of associativism of workers and their relationship with the various political forces which courted this audience, in particular, as we will see, the so-called ‘*Janista* populism.’

Accelerated economic development raised various challenges for São Paulo’s workers, both in the area of production and in relation to living conditions in a general manner. Urbanization in São Paulo at this time, called by many analysts a ‘peripheral growth pattern,’ implied first of all strong social segregation within the urban space. The upper and middle classes lived in more

central and better equipped neighborhoods, while workers and poor in general were moved to the city's vast periphery.¹⁰

In this way there emerged, and worsened, problems related to land speculation and urban infrastructure in a general manner (transport, sanitation, paving, public lighting, education and health equipment, etc.), as well as important modifications in the labor market related to the acceleration of industrialization and the greater diversification of the services sector. These phenomena interfered directly in workers' lives, provoking, amongst various aspects, great geographic mobility, scarcity, competition, and diversion and divergences within the working class. An intense process of the migration of workers from rural areas profoundly altered the social composition of the working class, resulting in fundamental political and cultural changes.

In the political sphere, the period 1945-1964 was marked by new types of relationships between workers and the state, characterized as a rule by the concept of 'populism,' with specific relationships of conflicts and reciprocities being established in a dynamic system of alliances and disputes between these social actors.¹¹ In the *Paulistano* context, this phenomena was translated not only by *Getulista* workerism, but also in the emergence of a wide range of political forces, of which *Ademarismo* and *Janismo* were the most important. Moreover, the communist left, despite being illegal for most of the period, was active and relatively strong at some times.

The workers expressed and confronted the challenges of this era through a series of strategies. Their social networks, based most often on informal relations between relatives, friends, those from the same districts, and members of communities, were fundamental not just for the process of migration from rural areas to the city, which a large part of them experienced, but also to deal with the difficulties of urban life and the dilemmas of the world of work. These networks and informal relations were at the base of an 'associative wave' and a large part of the political action experienced by the poorer classes in São Paulo at that time.¹² One of the central elements of the strong associativism of workers was the trade unions, but the phenomenon was not restricted to them, nor exclusively to the conflict between workers and employers. To the contrary, residents, recreational, education, charity, ethnic, mutual, cooperative, religious, and artistic-cultural associations formed a complex heterogeneous range of organizations which clearly expressed the formative process of a multi-faceted class, with different community values. Nevertheless, despite the diversity of associations, spaces of articulation and interaction between many

of these organizations can be found, particularly in critical moments, such as strikes and protests.¹³

Continuing the analysis carried out with Adriano Duarte of the role of residents' associations in the politics of São Paulo city in the period between the end of the Second World War and 1953 (see Duarte; Fontes, 2004), this article seeks to investigate the action of popular organizations with a territorial basis, especially those linked to the demands of residents of working class neighborhoods during the short municipal government of Jânio Quadros, a politician elected with the strong support of these movements. I begin with an initial analysis of a documentary *corpus* consisting of more than 250 processes, including letters, requests, applications and petitions sent by *Sociedades Amigos de Bairro* (Societies of Friends of Neighborhoods) to the Mayor of São Paulo's office during Quadros' administration in 1953 -1954.

A NEW REPERTOIRE OF POPULAR ORGANIZATION: THE *SOCIEDADES AMIGOS DE BAIRRO*

Residents' Associations from poor –called *popular* in Portuguese – neighborhoods have a long history in São Paulo, although they are little studied. References can be found to the so-called workers' leagues of neighborhoods such as Mooca, Brás and Lapa at the beginning of the twentieth century. These organizations appear to have played an important role in the mobilizations of residents of tenements and in direct actions in that period, as in the famous 1917 strike.

It was in the period immediately after the Second World War that saw the proliferation of residents' associations whose principal reference was the specific territory of a neighborhood, generally defined in terms of symbolic boundaries rather than the administrative divisions imposed by the municipality. Particularly encouraged and influenced by the ascendant *Partido Comunista do Brasil* (PCB – Brazilian Communist Party), the so-called *Comitês Democráticos e Populares* (CDPs – Democratic and Popular Committees) of neighborhoods rapidly spread through working class areas of the city, linking a wide ranging set of urban demands and the expansion of local democracy and urban administration.¹⁴

Although short and suffering permanent tensioned due to the attempts of the PCB leadership to place its members in them, the experience of the CDPs was fundamental in placing in the public sphere the growing demands

for the ‘right to the city,’ formulated by poorer sectors. It would also be of essential importance for the emergence of a new organizational form of territorialized popular associativism in São Paulo: *Sociedades Amigos de Bairro* (SABs – the Societies of Friends of Neighborhoods), which began to emerge at the end of the 1940s.

In the political vacuum provoked by the decree of the illegality of the PCB (and its subsequent move into an clandestine existence in 1947), it was the emerging political leadership of Jânio Quadros which managed, like no one else in the city, to capitalize and connect with this associative movement based on the popular neighborhoods in the metropole. This strong impulse decisively marked Quadros’ meteoric and impressive career, who in less than 13 years rose from a modest councilor in São Paulo to president of Brazil (successively being elected councilor, state deputy, mayor, governor, federal deputy and president).

One of the most controversial politicians in Brazilian history with his own particular style, the historical memory of Jânio Quadros was fundamentally marked by his surprising resignation of the Brazilian presidency in August 1961. Personalist and authoritarian, Jânio zigzagged through the national political spectrum. While his political career essentially began on the left, with the support of socialists (including Trotskyist groups) and the most progressive sectors of the Christian democrats, including various flirtations with the communists themselves, Quadros progressively, though never in a clear or resolute manner, moved to the right of the Brazilian national scenario. In the 1960 presidential elections he ran with the decisive support of conservative sectors, led by the UDN of Carlos Lacerda, who saw in Quadros their chance to finally defeat the heirs of *Varguismo*.

While in political circles Afonso Arinos’ joke, when he called Jânio ‘a drunken UDN,’ gained fame in the academic world, especially between 1960 and 1980, when theories of populism inspired by the work of Francisco Weffort were particularly influent, Quadros was identified as a ‘populist of the right,’ a charismatic manipulator of the masses and a worthy representative of the lower middle classes. In the last decade, however, various studies have problematized this well-known political characterization of Jânio Quadros.¹⁵

A detailed analysis of Jânio’s political career or the phenomenon of *Janismo* is outside the scope of this article. Analyzes of the ‘populist political system’ in Brazil formulated by John French and the insights of Alexandre Fortes, based on the thought of E. P. Thompson, looking at the relationship

between workers and demagogic leaders, certainly offer interesting clues for this type of investigation.¹⁶

As I have argued on another occasion, despite the insufficiencies and problems which the idea of populism implies, (particularly the emphasis on the supposed control and manipulation of the working masses), its mere rejection or substitution by concepts such as ‘workerism,’ ‘the labor project’ or the ‘labor tradition with a popular statist program,’ does not take into account the complexity of the political game and the participation of popular sectors in the public sphere in the period after the Second World War, not just in Brazil, but also in other Latin American countries. These explanatory keys overestimate trade union aspects and labor relations, neglecting the “urban dimensions, a vital aspect in the lives of workers, particularly in cities which had a large industrial expansion during those years.”¹⁷

Leaders such as Jânio Quadros, although they flirted and sought to construct ties with the trade union movement, built their political careers on the basis of recognition of the urban question and the enormous problems caused by the intense growth rate of cities. Quadros was probably the outstanding post-war political leader in this area, but he was not at all the only one with this agenda. Local political leaders in the principal Brazilian cities at that moment had similar themes and made alliances with popular sectors using common language and repertoires of action. The idea of “a populist political system which influenced the behavior of all participants” seems useful to analyze relations between workers, the state, the middle classes, and the bourgeoisie at a particular historic moment of democratic expansion and the construction of poly-classist alliances (cf. French, 1995, p.267). Furthermore, it emphasizes and privileges the fundamental action of popular sectors not only in the narrow sphere of labor and trade union relations, but also in the wider experience of workers and their relations with the world of politics.

In the scope of this article we are interested in perceiving how residents’ associations played a decisive role in the construction of the Jânio Quadros’ political trajectory, and principally in his short period as mayor in 1953 and 1954 (an administration is very little studied), as Societies of Friends of Neighborhoods were created and built up a strong associative discourse with many demands in which the identity of workers was a fundamental discursive element. Far from ordinary simplification, both in the common sense and in the pretensions of some scientific analyzes, Jânio Quadros’ trajectory cannot be resumed in that of a charismatic leader manipulating an amorphous mass. A new repertoire of civil society organizations emerged after the Second World

War, with neighborhood problems and territorial associations being the central axes. Its language, as we will see, was strongly based on a classist vocabulary, in which the condition of resident was linked to that of worker and bearer of rights. Jânio Quadros' leadership and popularity, with all their contradictions, demagogic and careerist aspects, are to a great extent the fruit of this enormous process.

JÂNIO QUADROS: "CHAMPION OF THE PERIPHERY"

Jânio Quadros was elected councilor in São Paulo for the Partido Democrata Cristão (PDC – Christian Democratic Party) at the end of the 1940s¹⁸ and soon made a name for himself as a ferocious opponent of the then governor Ademar de Barros and his Partido Social Progressista (PSP – Progressive Social Party).¹⁹ He became famous for his strong criticism and his accusations of corruption and excesses of the mayors indicated by Ademar and his party.²⁰

However, it would be his approach to the issues and problems of the residents of peripheral São Paulo neighborhoods in the Municipal Chamber which would make Jânio Quadros one of the best known politicians in the city and definitely marked his political career from then on. In tune with the growing demand for urban improvements, goods and services for workers living in the suburbs and poor regions of the city, Quadros transformed in his own particular way these demands into his own agenda and thereby won enormous popularity and prestige.²¹

Scarcity, abuses committed by unscrupulous retailers, lack of housing and transport, and train delays were, amongst others, constant themes vehemently repeated by the councilor in his speeches in the Council Chamber and his numerous visits to poor neighborhoods. Light, then the public utility company responsible for the supply of electricity in the city, was particularly criticized and attacked by Jânio. Quadros politicized the difficult routine of those living in the city and thereby increasingly appeared as a type of paladin for the *Paulistana* periphery.

Jânio also innovated by not restricting the public debate about these questions to the Council Chamber. He regularly visited the various neighborhoods in the city, observing what was happening from up close and listening to the complaints of residents. In a short period of time he became close to a number of local organizations. Supported by the newspaper *A Hora*,²² Jânio raised the hottest question of each region of the city, reported in this newspaper and

reported with the habitual inflamed verve of the councilor in the *Paulistano* council.

In addition to connecting a series of relations and supports in local associations and clubs, neighborhood visits allowed direct control with a large number of workers, unaccustomed to seeing politicians up close outside electoral periods. In these meetings Jânio Quadros constructed the image of a different politician, a simple and accessible man, really near and interested in the life and problems of the poor residents on the periphery.²³ Since his campaign for councilor in 1947, Quadros had perceived the importance of direct contact with the public through meetings, visits, and rallies in peripheral neighborhoods. The political experience of the PCB in the previous years had shown various politicians who courted the same working class bases as Jânio, how much these meetings could reap in terms of popularity and electoral fruits.²⁴ In addition to the political content in itself, Quadros, like few others, knew how to explore the ludic nature which the workers of the periphery attributed to rallies.

By emphasizing honesty and struggle for administrative morality as political slogans, Jânio widened further the differences in the popular imagination between him and the governor Ademar de Barros, seen as corrupt (the latter's supporters were, for example, the authors of the famous phrase: 'he steals, but he does'), and the political machine of the PSP, famous for clientelism, doing favors, and also for at times violent actions in the political struggle. As one analyst commented, "he thereby created... his own image of the 'conscience of authority' and the vigilante, the shelter of the weak and wronged. With this image, he won the heart of the city" (cf. Walmsley, 1992, p.81).

Although the problems in the peripheral neighborhoods and regions of the city were, in addition to the questions related to administrative morality, the central themes of Jânio's parliamentary action, he also often supported the strikes and protests of workers against those he classified as 'arrogant and greedy,' as well as the repressive measures of the Dutra government against the trade union movement. In his speeches, Quadros frequently denounced the precarious working conditions in various *Paulistana* industries and demanded that labor legislation be complied with. After becoming a deputy at the beginning of the 1950s, he effusively defended the demands of striking railway and bank workers. The old trade union leader Luiz Tenório de Lima, known as Tenorinho, remembered that the stoppage of the latter in 1951 was of great political advantage for Jânio. "He took advantage of the strike," Lima wrote. "He stood in front of the strikers and created a phrase that became famous at

the time: ‘more bread for the bank workers, less cigars for the bankers’ (cf. Lima, 1998, p.24).

This political action rapidly expanded Jânio’s popularity. In 1950 he was the most voted candidate for the Legislative Assembly, with 17,840 votes. In the local political scenario, Quadros’ profile was placed alongside a wider left-wing grouping. He was linked to parliamentarians from the *Partido Socialista Brasileiro* (PSB – Brazilian Socialist Party) and, although he declared himself anti-communist, he attracted some sympathies from the PCB by defending strikes for better salaries and the peace movement waged by the party during the Korean War. Jânio also protested against the imprisonment of the communist weaver Elisa Branco, who had been detained for participating in a demonstration against the sending of Brazilian troops to Korea (cf. Chaiá, 1991, p.62 and 59).

When the São Paulo state capital recovered its administrative autonomy and elections for mayor were set for March 1953, Jânio Quadros emerged as a politician with a vast support network in popular neighborhoods, through organizations such as the *Sociedades Amigos de Bairros* (SABs – Societies of Friends of Neighborhoods), which had started to organize. However, more than this he was also able to accept the adherence of other political currents, such as the PSB and a wide part of the PTB, who broke with the official candidacy of Francisco Antônio Cardoso and even nominated the candidate for vice on Jânio’s slate: General Porfírio da Paz.

Despite this the political world the political world initially received Jânio’s candidacy for mayor as bravado. Francisco Antônio Cardoso, the Health Secretary of the government of Lucas Garcez, appeared to be an unbeatable candidate. Supported by a coalition of seven parties (PSP, PSD, UDN, PTB, PRP, PR and PRT) which involved practically all the principal forces of the state, Cardoso was the great favorite of the backroom offices and the press. The PCB supported the candidacy of André Nunes Júnior, a former PTB councilor who had supported the Autonomous Alliance for Peace and Against Scarcity, which was inspired by the communists. Nunes Júnior’s vice, running for the PST, was Nelson Rustici, president of the Textile Workers Union of São Paulo.

Using the slogan ‘a penny against the million,’ in a reference to the huge economic resources of Cardoso’s candidacy, and the famous symbol of the ‘broom,’ Jânio’s campaign summarized the principal themes of his career until then. He brought to the political debate the demands of those living in the periphery, preached the moralization of administration, and excited the population of São Paulo with noisy rallies and vehement speeches. His victory was

overwhelming. The more peripheral the area of the city, the greater the percentage of votes received by Quadros, defeated only in the rich Jardim América. Analyzing this election, the sociologist Fernando Henrique Cardoso said that with Jânio the periphery of the city (which in a jovial tone he called the “bottom of the pot of society”) “made itself present in public life.” For José Álvaro Moisés, the election of Quadros inaugurated “the neighborhood as a political unit.” In total Jânio obtained 65.8% of the votes.²⁵

“HUMBLE WORKERS” REQUIRE A FAIRER CITY

The election of Jânio Quadros as mayor of São Paulo was seen by a large part of people at the time as being a political earthquake. The expression ‘the Revolution of 22 March,’ adopted by enthusiasts of the recently elected mayor, referred not just to the day of the election, but also to the intensity of transformations intended. Jânio’s election highlighted popular discontent, which could not be ignored. The editorialists of *O Estado de S. Paulo*, a newspaper which had supported the candidacy of Francisco Cardoso, confessed that they were surprised, but acknowledged that, more than Jânio Quadros,

the victorious Sunday generals [in the election], in São Paulo, were inflation which devalued the currency and made life more expensive, the scarcity of electricity, the lack of trams and buses, the increase in the price of rice and beans, the existence of basements, tenements, and *favelas*, the absence of water supply and sewage networks, the lack of medical care and other similar ills.²⁶

The ‘victorious generals’ continued to act. In the week after the election a large strike brought the principal industries in the city to a halt, in a wide-ranging protest movement that would run for almost a month in São Paulo. Known as the “Strike of the 300,000,” it was organized to a great extent by the textile, metallurgical, and print workers, amongst others, in factories and working class neighborhoods.²⁷ The strike had a strong impact on the working class movement in São Paulo and the rest of the country, initiating a new phase of increased organization and a public presence of trade unions. In a few days in the ballot boxes and on the streets, the economic and political elites of the city were surprised by the vitality of popular action.

In a city which was increasingly socially segmented, the demands for a better life in the poor neighborhoods and districts amplified during the elections and the working class strikes soon echoed in the ears of a mayor who had

been elected as the 'paladin of the periphery.' At the same time, pressurized by the expectations that he himself helped to create and politically interested in the structuring of a solid political base, Jânio sought to deepen still further his relationship with the SABs and tried to develop a program of public improvements and in some way to respond to the numerous demands for goods and urban services of the suburban population.

As a result the letters, petitions, requests, etc., sent directly to the mayor's office constitute a privileged source for the understanding of the relationship between this growing associative and demanding dynamic and the actions of one of the principal personalities in the populist political system in the country at a decisive moment of the affirmation of his leadership and political structure. Some of the processes analyzed contain budgets, statutes, minutes of meetings, and other documents which also allow a more detailed examination of the structure of these associations and their lives and internal political conflicts. Moreover, the descriptions and narratives about the neighborhoods represented can reveal much about the forms of sociability, but also about the tensions and different cleavages existing in these communities.

What is immediately striking in the first contact with this documentation is the exponential growth of the demands of the societies after April 1953, the month Jânio Quadros took office. The sending of letters and requests from the SABs directly to mayors precedes the government of Jânio, but it is during his administration that it apparently became a generalized practice. In the short period of his administration (Quadros took leave of office from the mayoralty in July 1954 to run in the elections for state governor, in which he was victorious), the mayor's office received an 'avalanche' of requests and submission by the residents of the most varied poor districts in the city. Most of these were sent by Societies of Friends of Neighborhoods.

To a certain extent, it was to be expected that this would occur. As has already stated and repeated by authors of different perspectives, Jânio's 1953 campaign was strongly associated with the growing movement of the formation of residents' associations in São Paulo, in particular the SABs.²⁸ Jânio's victory accelerated this process further. Judging by the dates of the foundation dates present on the logos of letters sent to the mayor, various of the 'Societies of Friends' (the complement 'of the neighborhood' was added later by the large majority of them) were created in the months before Quadros' election.

Aware of the political potential of the societies and clearly interested in keeping himself close to them, the mayor himself encouraged their protagonist demands. In a petition signed by more than six thousand people sent to Jânio

by the Society of Friends of Vila Izolina Mazzei, the residents of the neighborhood, “all poor workers,” demanded a series of improvements for the region and remembered the speech “solemnly given in the Society of Friends of Moinho Velho, and published in *A Gazeta* [newspaper]”, in which Jânio “asked residents to draft petitions about public improvement whenever possible through their SOCIETIES OF FRIENDS OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD.”²⁹

Apparently Jânio took his words seriously. The large majority of requests analyzed contained annotations in the mayor’s own writing, demanding that measures be taken by the bureaucratic sector responsible for the area in question. Below his annotations a stamp with the word ‘urgent’ was frequently used. Other time the stamp could be even more incisive with the ‘order of the mayor’ which followed the phrase ‘implement’ and the signature of Jânio Quadros.³⁰

All the requests created processes which forged their own paths through the agencies responsible within the municipality’s administrative machinery. Often, however, mere bureaucratic movements did not state what happened to the request. In certain situations, when the technical report was for some reason negative, but the political interest of the mayor was in another direction, the advice of the supposed experts was rapidly discarded.³¹

When the resolution was quick and positive, it was common for the mayor himself to send a letter to the Society of Friends. This was even more in situations in situations where the requests asked for the mayor’s intervention with telephone (Companhia Telefônica Brasileira) or electric companies (Light) in order to provide the neighborhood with a telephone (usually to be installed in a pharmacy or bakery in the region) or public lighting. These cases which did not need direct action from the municipal secretaries or departments, were well suited for Jânio to put on his paladin’s clothes and to pressurize companies such as Light, target of his virulent attacks since he had been a councilor. As a way of demonstrating his concern the mayor acted quickly in these cases.

For example, in a letter dated 12 April 1954, the directors of the Society of Friends of Vila Olímpia asked for a public telephone in a neighborhood bakery, remembering that, “as we have *verbally* explained to Your Excellency, the lower part of the neighborhood does not have a single phone, which prevents urgent communications” (emphasis added). Two days later, Jânio sent a reply to the Society, stating that he had already ordered the telephone line and apparatus. In this case the mayor’s request from the telephone company was not necessarily a guarantee that it would be promptly made, but it was a clear sign of a channel of communication directly open with the highest

authority in the municipality, which demonstrated a personal touch, as well as promptness in answering the demands of the population.

SAB demands provide details of a wide-ranging scenario of an enormous lack of urban infrastructure and the daily difficulties of majority of the population of the pound 'metropole of work.' As a result effective participation in the vaunted progress and development of São Paulo, the 'right to the city,' was demanded. After all, as the directors of the Society of Friends of Vila Gumercindo noted, in presenting their demands in a letter sent to the mayor on 24 June 1953, "we have nothing of what a neighborhood of a modern city should have."³²

Requests for the paving of roads, the installation of telephones and public lighting, the collection of rubbish, street markets, and the creation and extension of bus lines represented the great majority of requests. There were also requests for the creation of a children's playground and a crèche in the neighborhood, sometimes with detailed (including maps) of what was the best location, even petitions for the placement of curtains and blinds in the local school group.³³

In addition to being bodies for mobilizing residents and making demands, the Societies of Friends were also spaces of sociability and leisure. Many of them, as some studies have demonstrated, were born out of local sports (especially amateur football) or dance clubs, or more general clubs, or were associated with them (cf. Duarte, 2002; Neto, 2011; Fontes, 2008). It should not thus be of any great wonder to find in the middle of so many demands for urban improvements, the request for permission by the Society of Friends of Tremembé and Zona da Cantareira "to hold four Carnival balls and two children's parties in the revelries of Carnival", in February 1953.³⁴

The channels which opened between the SABs and local municipal power were also perceived by other local institutions and organizations, which sometimes sent specific requests through the former societies. This was what, for example, Fr. Antonio de Fillipo did, who requested Egisto Domenicali, president of the Society of Friends of Vila Palmeiras, to ask the mayor to "pave the area in front of the [neighborhood] parish church."³⁵

An important part of the processes refer to requests for urban improvement works, in particular the paving of streets and constructions in general. Having the street paved was generally a preliminary condition to asking for other improvements, such as public transport and lighting. Furthermore, as soon as he took office, Jânio launched an 'Emergency Plan'(PE – *Plano de Emergência*) to implement public works, in particular paving streets. This

encouraged various SABs, who began to demand the inclusion of the streets of their neighborhoods in the municipal PE.

This was the case of the Society of Friends of Unidos das Vilas (which covered the neighborhoods of Casa Verde, Santana and Nossa Senhora do Ó), founded on 12 March 1953 (ten days before the election of Quadros). Signed by the president of the SAB, Álvaro Leite, the letter sent to the mayor on 14 June 1953 asked for “the necessary improvement on Rua Gonçalves Figueira to be carried out.” This street was located in Casa Verde, “on the right of the playground being built in the neighborhood... included in the Emergency Plan.”³⁶

These direct interventions in the daily lives of residents, despite being apparently small, and often the fruit of the pressure of the SABs, reinforced even more the image of Jânio as a politician “friend of the people ... principally and in particular a friend of the small and those who fought from sun to sun to win their daily bread.”³⁷ The improvements of the streets where they lived and moved appeared to have remained strongly in the memory of many of the old residents of the peripheral neighborhoods. João Freitas Lírio, for example, a resident of São Miguel Paulista since 1950, considered the election of Quadros as a landmark for the region. Jânio, Lírio commented, “came here and asphalted, he paved the road of the factory by the station ... With him things began to improve.” Eduardo Rosmaninho, a longstanding resident of Bosque da Saúde, also thought that Quadros was the “first public man to did something for the region,” since it had been him “who had asphalted the first streets, organized the collection of rubbish, the first street market” (cf. Duarte; Fontes, 2004, p.110).

The language of the majority of requests, letters, and petitions was far from asking for a ‘favor’.³⁸ In general they were respectful and formal. While the thanks and praise (his “great public spirit” and “elevated sense of justice”)³⁹ for the mayor was wholesome, so too were the demands and references made when he was a candidate or in a visit to the neighborhood. Personal contacts made beforehand with politicians, or visits made by residents to the offices of authorities were, whenever possible, supported by correspondence. In this way, the directors of the Society of Friends of Vila Ipojuca, in their request for the creation of a street market addressed to “Doutor Professor Alípio Correia Netto”, Secretary of Public Hygiene in the Jânio administration, remembered that the letter sent was meant to reinforce “what he had the chance to personally report to him.”⁴⁰

Intrigued with the phenomenon of *Janismo*, authors such as Aziz Simão and José Álvaro Moisés have emphasized that Jânio Quadros’ relationship with

workers was fundamentally based on their being residents of the municipality. Nevertheless, it was with the language of labor that the residents represented in the SABs often demanded their rights from the mayor. Repeatedly the condition of ‘working class neighborhood’ was highlighted in most part of the letters and requests. “The large number of workers, young women, and men who lived in Vila Independência in Ipiranga was not only remembered by the local SAB.” The SAB of Vila Gumerindo highlighted that the neighborhood consisted of a “working population with more than 10,000 inhabitants,” while the residents of Vila D. Pedro II called themselves “humble workers,” but wanted “justice.”⁴¹ It was also as workers that the residents of São Paulo demanded their right to the city.

Jânio’s connections with the SABs played a fundamental role in the construction of the image of the politician, in the creation of the channels connecting Quadros and the population and in the formation of a loyal and well-oiled political machine on which the future president would count for many years. Various of the presidents and directors of the Societies of Friends remained adoring *Janistas*, and some of them actually built up their own political careers. However, it seems to me to be a mistake, made by a significant part of the bibliography of this area, in both the oldest works (see Moisés, 1978; Weffort, 1980; Gohn, 1991; Singer; Brandt, 1980), and in some recent studies,⁴² to reduce the SABs to mere clientelist organizations, solely based on the logic of the “exchange of material benefits for votes” (cf. Avritzer, 2004, p.12), and thus being seen as one of the principal examples of populist schemes (in the case of São Paulo, represented by *Janismo*) of manipulation and cooption.

This perspective has been intensely and convincingly criticized by scholars such as Adriano Duarte and Murilo Leal, amongst others. Furthermore, the study of the trajectory of the Societies of Friends of Neighborhoods in São Paulo during the 1950s and 1960s clearly showed that although the Janista influence remained strong, various political forces, including communist and other leftwing groups, began to dispute the hegemony of the associative movement in the city neighborhoods. The creation of the Federation of Societies of Friends of Neighborhoods (*Federação de Sociedade Amigos de Bairro – Fesab*) in 1957 and the progressive ties between the SABs and trade unions, as well as the important presence of these organization of mobilizations against scarcity, in generalized strike movements, and in the struggle for grassroots reforms in the explosive scenario between 1962 and 1964, indicate a much more complex and multifaceted picture of these associations.⁴³

I believe that the still incipient analysis of petitions and demands of Societies of Friends of Neighborhoods contained in this article, illuminates a little more the understanding of the tense reciprocal relations established between workers and populist political leaders in the urban context of the 1950s and 1960s. Understanding how workers had an impact of the process of urbanization, becoming fundamental political actors in the life of the city, can help us appreciate in a more sophisticated manner the rich history of associativism in São Paulo and the construction of citizenship in Brazil.

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NOTES

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² In relation to the use of images of the *Bandeirantes* during the celebrations for the 400th anniversary see MOURA, 1994, p.241. See also WEINSTEIN, 2006.

³ Cf. COLISTETE, 2001, esp. chp. 1. See also NETO, 2011, chp. 1.

⁴ Advertisement from Banco Moreira Sales, cited in MOURA, 1994, p.241.

⁵ *O Estado de S. Paulo*, 25 Jan. 1954.

⁶ Statement of Airton Irineu dos Santos, 24 Jan. 2012. Available at: www.saopaulominhacidade.com.br/list.asp?ID=6116; Accessed on 27 April 2012.

⁷ Processo 071441/1954. Divisão do Arquivo Municipal de Processos (DGDP-2). Secretaria Municipal de Planejamento, Orçamento e Gestão – São Paulo.

⁸ Processo 129598/1954. Divisão do Arquivo Municipal de Processos (DGDP-2). Secretaria Municipal de Planejamento, Orçamento e Gestão – São Paulo.

⁹ See, Processos 133526/1954 a 133524/1954. Divisão do Arquivo Municipal de Processos (DGDP-2). Secretaria Municipal de Planejamento, Orçamento e Gestão – São Paulo.

¹⁰ The “pattern of peripheral growth” was analyzed in KOWARICK et al., 1988. See also CALDEIRA, 2000.

¹¹ There is a large and diversified bibliography about populism. For an analysis of some of the principal approaches to the subject, including perspectives which criticize the use of this concept, see WEFFORT, 1980; FRENCH, 1995; FERREIRA, 2001.

¹² A similar phenomenon, but with local particularities, seems to have occurred in other cities in the country (such as Rio de Janeiro, Belo Horizonte, Salvador and Porto Alegre) which also underwent a rapid process of urbanization and economic changes in that period. See, amongst others, FISCHER, 2008; FORTES, 2004; SILVA, 2001; OLIVEIRA, 2012.

¹³ A particularly interesting example can be found in the ‘strike of the 400,000’ in 1957, when various neighborhood and community societies gave the movement support. Cf. FONTES, 1999; FONTES; MACEDO, 2013; NETO, 2011.

¹⁴ For the CDPs in São Paulo see principally DUARTE, 2008. The phenomenon was also strong in Rio de Janeiro. See PINHEIRO, 2007.

¹⁵ Cf., in particular: DUARTE, 2008; FONTES, 2008; NETO, 2011; QUELER, 2011; 2010.

¹⁶ Cf. FRENCH, 1995; FORTES, 2010.

¹⁷ Cf. FONTES, 2008, p.31. The debate about populism was developed in the section “Origem rural, trabalhadores e política (Rural origin, workers, and politics)” in the introduction to the book. It was also dealt with in DUARTE; FONTES, 2004.

¹⁸ The report about the beginning of Jânio Quadros’ political career in this section is based on a similar analysis made by me in FONTES, 2008, p.247-253.

¹⁹ In the São Paulo elections, Jânio received 1074 votes, the second highest vote for the PDC. According to Vera Chaia this place was insufficient to guarantee Jânio a seat as councilor. However, due to the illegality of the Communist Party and the cassation of the mandates of the councilors elected by the PST (PCB), seats were redistributed among the other parties and the PDC came to have four representatives, including Jânio. This version came to be widely disseminated and known in the political history of the city. However, Adriano

Duarte, citing TRE data from the period, stated that Jânio received 1707 votes, which guaranteed his seat, since the PDC had the right to three seats in the Council Chamber, irrespective of the cassation of the communist councilors. Cf. CHAIA, 1991, p.19; DUARTE, 2002, p.176-177.

²⁰ Having no administrative autonomy, which would only be granted in 1953, the state capital was run at that time by mayors appointed by the state government.

²¹ For a specific analysis of the beginnings of Jânio's career, see WALMSLEY, 1992.

²² *A Hora*, a newspaper owned by Denner Médici, associated itself with Jânio at the beginning of his political career. The periodical gave ample coverage to his visits to various peripheral neighborhoods, and frequently published Quadros' proposals and demands, both in the Municipal Council and in the Legislative Assembly. It was the only newspaper to support Jânio's mayoral candidacy in 1953. Later, however, the board of the daily newspaper broke with the elected mayor. In the 1954 elections for governor it was aligned with the candidacy of Prestes Maia. At the beginning of the 1960s, *A Hora* stopped being published.

²³ In her research with the inhabitants of a *vila* in São Miguel at the beginning of the 1980s, Teresa Caldeira highlighted the strong memories which some of the older residents had to Jânio Quadros, the most remembered of the politicians from the pre-1964 period in the neighborhood. He "was represented," according to Caldeira, "not only as a governor who had done something for the people, but as someone who was from the people... he had a poor origin and wore any clothes, even a dirty coat, and walked through the neighborhoods 'drinking *pinga* in glasses' with his voters". Cf. CALDEIRA, 1984, p.273.

²⁴ Adriano Duarte commented that in Jânio's 1953 campaign for mayor, "while his adversaries rented large halls and held their political meetings indoors, with the public comfortably seated, Jânio went to his voters" with his street rallies. Cf. DUARTE, 2002.

²⁵ Cf. CARDOSO; LAMOUNIER (Org.), 1975, p.55; MOISÉS, 1978; CHAIA, 1991, p.72. For a detailed analysis of the relationship between Quadros' victorious campaign and popular organizations based in local neighborhoods, such as resident associations, amateur football clubs, local committees, etc., see DUARTE; FONTES, 2004.

²⁶ *O Estado de S. Paulo*, 24 Mar. 1954.

²⁷ For different approaches to the strike of 300,000, see MOISÉS, 1978; COSTA, 1995; WOLFE, 1993; and NETO, 2011.

²⁸ See, amongst others, MOISÉS, 1978; DUARTE, 2002; GOHN, 1991; SINGER; BRANDT, 1980.

²⁹ Processo 175660/1954. Divisão do Arquivo Municipal de Processos (DGDP-2). Secretaria Municipal de Planejamento, Orçamento e Gestão – São Paulo.

³⁰ This was the case, for example, of the request from the Society of Friends of Vila Esperança who in a letter dated 18 May 1954, requested that a gutter be provided for one of the principal streets in the neighborhood. See Processo 1138376/1954. Divisão do Arquivo Municipal de Processos (DGDP-2). Secretaria Municipal de Planejamento, Orçamento e Gestão – São Paulo.

³¹ Although this lies outside the scope of this article, these cases (*processos* in Portuguese) are also an excellent source for understanding the mechanisms of the processing and the granting (or not) of popular demands in the municipal administrative machine, as well as providing interesting clues for understanding the chains of command in public power and the relations between the elected administrators and the relations between the elected administrators and the bureaucracy of the public service.

³² Processo 118840/1954. Divisão do Arquivo Municipal de Processos (DGDP-2). Secretaria Municipal de Planejamento, Orçamento e Gestão – São Paulo.

³³ As requested initially by the SAB of Vila Guilherme and by SAB of Vila Matilde after. See Processos 162258/1954 and 122407/ 1954. Divisão do Arquivo Municipal de Processos (DGDP-2). Secretaria Municipal de Planejamento, Orçamento e Gestão – São Paulo.

³⁴ Processo 28232/1953. Divisão do Arquivo Municipal de Processos (DGDP-2). Secretaria Municipal de Planejamento, Orçamento e Gestão – São Paulo.

³⁵ Processo 157177/1954. Divisão do Arquivo Municipal de Processos (DGDP-2). Secretaria Municipal de Planejamento, Orçamento e Gestão – São Paulo.

³⁶ Processo 158178/1954. Divisão do Arquivo Municipal de Processos (DGDP-2). Secretaria Municipal de Planejamento, Orçamento e Gestão – São Paulo.

³⁷ Processo 139256/1954. Divisão do Arquivo Municipal de Processos (DGDP-2). Secretaria Municipal de Planejamento, Orçamento e Gestão – São Paulo.

³⁸ There have been few studies of the language of petitions and requests in Brazil. Most of the works about letters and requests to politicians and authorities or letters from ordinary people to newspapers, in general look at individual letters. For an example of analyzes of letters sent to Getúlio Vargas using a different perspective, see FERREIRA, 1997; REIS, 2004.

³⁹ See, respectively, processes 160804/1954 and 118840/1954. Divisão do Arquivo Municipal de Processos (DGDP-2). Secretaria Municipal de Planejamento, Orçamento e Gestão – São Paulo.

⁴⁰ Processo 104888/1954. Divisão do Arquivo Municipal de Processos (DGDP-2). Secretaria Municipal de Planejamento, Orçamento e Gestão – São Paulo.

⁴¹ See, respectively, processes 129598/1954, 118840/1954 and 139256/1954. Divisão do Arquivo Municipal de Processos (DGDP-2). Secretaria Municipal de Planejamento, Orçamento e Gestão – São Paulo.

⁴² Some very interesting papers, such as those of HOLSTON, 2008, and AVRITZER, 2004, repeat the same theses of populist manipulation, clientelism and *Janista* control of the SABs.

⁴³ Cf. FONTES, 2008, esp. chp. 5, and NETO, 2011, chps. 4 and 8.

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