

Antônio Maciel Bonfim (*Miranda*): a biographical sketch

Antônio Maciel Bonfim (Miranda): um esboço biográfico

Raimundo Nonato Pereira Moreira*¹

RESUMO

Este artigo discute a trajetória intelectual e a formação política de Antônio Maciel Bonfim (1905-1947), codinome *Miranda*, militante revolucionário e secretário-geral do Partido Comunista do Brasil (PCB) entre os anos de 1934 e 1936. Com base em investigações realizadas em fontes documentais e jornalísticas, o trabalho sugere a necessidade de reavaliação da biografia do dirigente comunista.

Palavras-chave: Antônio Maciel Bonfim (*Miranda*); História; Partido Comunista do Brasil (PCB).

ABSTRACT

This article discusses the intellectual trajectory and political formation of Antônio Maciel Bonfim (1905-1947), also known as *Miranda*, a revolutionary activist and General Secretary of the Communist Party of Brazil (PCB) between 1934 and 1936. Based on investigations of documentary and journalistic sources, the work suggests the need for revisions in the biography of the communist leader.

Keywords: Antônio Maciel Bonfim (*Miranda*); History; Communist Party of Brazil (PCB).

A complex person in the history of Brazilian leftwing organizations, Antônio Maciel Bonfim (1905-1947) has still not been the subject of a specific historic investigation. Based on this premise, this article systematizes the results ongoing research, with the perspective of discussing the trajectory of the communist leader. Through an inquiry in documentary and journalistic sources held by the Public Archive of the State of Rio de Janeiro (Aperj), the Public Library of the State of Bahia (BPEB), the National Library (BN), the Maurício Grabois Foundation, the Geographic and Historical Institute of Bahia (IGHB), and the Center of Documentation and Memory of Alagoinhas (Cendoma), the

* Universidade do Estado da Bahia (UNEB). Salvador, BA, Brasil. raimundononatopereiramoreira@yahoo.com.br

text also problematizes determined choices made by Bonfim before his transformation into the legendary *Miranda*. Therefore, identifying and unraveling evidence related to his life involves revisiting the historiographic debates about the biographical explosion in contemporaneity and, more specifically the composition of historic biography (Dosse, 2009; Levi, in Ferreira; Amado, 1998, pp. 167-182; Levillain, in Rémond, 1996, pp. 141-184; Loriga, 2011).

BEFORE FAME

Antônio Maciel Bonfim was born in the municipality of Irará, Bahia, on 10 February 1905, son of the peasants João Matias do Bonfim and Maria Maciel Bonfim.² After his family moved to the neighboring city of Alagoinhas, the boy (nicknamed ‘Guaxinim’ by his classmates) studied in Educandário Maria Imaculada – also known as the ‘Marist Brothers College.’³ According to Barros (1979, p. 149), coming from La Valla-en-Gier, France, the Maristas reached Salvador in 1904, opening a college in the Bahian capital on 23 July of the same year. On 7 February 1905, they established a school in Alagoinhas. In 1915, after offering the Elementary and Complementary courses for ten years, the Marist Brothers College closed down.

In accordance with an interview given by Pedro Bonfim, our subject’s brother, who had a degree in law, his dedication to his studies allowed the young Antônio to win the sympathy of the priests responsible for Educandário Maria Imaculada. These advised his father to send him to the Marista Seminary in Recife. In the cloister, the novice continued his passion for books, devouring in his adolescence the works of Cesare Cantu (1804-1895), Élisée Reclus (1830-1905), Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), Louis Adolphe Thiers (1797-1877), the *Histoire des Girondins*, by Alphonse de Lamartine (1790-1869), volumes about Napoleon, and others about History and Politics. In the point in discussion, Pedro Bonfim performed the role of the biographer, to the extent that he established casual relations and attributed meaning to the readings made by the student, decisive for the education of the communist activist: “He quickly exhausted the school library. I believe that he harvested there the revolutionary seed.”⁴

At the beginning of the 1920s, Antônio abandoned his ecclesiastical career and joined the army, serving in the capital of the Republic. In accordance with the information provided by his brother, as a young soldier he participated in the 1924 Paulista Revolt, establishing there his first contact with revolutionary practice.⁵ In relation to Bonfim's time in the armed forces, it was not possible to establish more precise data. But political comrades and contemporaries recognize that the *sertanejo* from Irará either did military service in the army or joined the police in Bahia, reaching the rank of sergeant (Lima, 1982, p. 172; Reis, 1987, p. 32; Rodrigues, in Fausto, 1993, p. 378).

Immediately after this, Bonfim reappeared in Bahia, becoming a teacher in Antônio Figueiredo College, in Salvador. According to Barros (1979, p. 298), the young teacher also worked in secondary courses in various teaching establishments in Alagoínhas. Judging by the sources investigated, Antônio was a dedicated educator. In relation to this point, during an interview granted in April 1940, the former general secretary of the PCB (the Brazilian Communist Party) stated that he had taught French, Maths, and other subjects.⁶

He also was active in journalism, becoming a collaborator and editor of the weekly *Correio de Alagoínhas*. Bonfim signed at least six articles in this newspaper from the interior of the state: "Conscience" (13 April 1925), "Remembering" (25 May 1925), "The ideal" (25 May 1925), "Evolution" (29 July 1925), "We expect many reforms and divorce" (7 June 1926), and "North and south of Brazil" (26 July 1926). In the texts in which political questions occupy the center of the concerns of the writer, a moderate criticism of the woes of the First Republic appears. In an article published on 7 June 1926, he demonstrated enthusiasm about voting on some bills by the new federal legislature, coinciding with the beginning of the Washington Luís administration (1926-1930): changes in the currency standard; electoral reform; the repeal of the Press Law; and the adoption of divorce. Interceding in favor of the norm which authorized the separation of couples, he predicted strong reactions from the adversary camp: "Many moralist clouds will rise up against divorce, seen here, in this land of light, as an abominable thing, as an attack on the family, honor, tradition." And he concluded: "None of this gentlemen; you debate it in vain. The existence of divorce is like that of the penitentiary, those who want or need it use

it.” In the 26 July text, he protested against regional asymmetries and the vicissitudes of the federative pact: “The North cannot live in the same form as the South. What is just for the South is extortion for the North with a more backward civilization, scarce resources, a different people, and different productions, and vice-versa.”⁷

During his visit to a school exhibition, the intellectual fell in love with a teacher from ‘Jesus, Maria, José’ College, writing a story about her in *Correio de Alagoinhas*. The romance became an engagement, lasting until September 1929 at least. Aiming to improve his financial situation, he moved to Aracaju, capital of Sergipe state, where he worked in the state bank. In December 1927, Bonfim was secretary of the institution. However, he got sick and returned to Bahia. Before getting involved in conspiracies and secret meetings, he worked as an assistant to the port services company *Wilson Sons & Company Ltda.*⁸

THE REVOLUTIONARY

Antônio Maciel participated in the Liberal Alliance campaign as an independent, supporting the Getúlio Vargas-João Pessoa slate. After the defeat of the liberal coalition in the election of 1 March 1930, he began to conspire. His links with opposition elements led to an opportunity to return to the capital of the Republic, as an emissary of the Alliance in Bahia. It is probable that his presence in Rio de Janeiro resulted in a trip to the south of the country and to his subsequent links with Luiz Carlos Prestes (1898-1990), who was exiled in Buenos Aires.

In a similar type of approach, General João de Oliveira Freitas emphasized that in April 1930 Bonfim abandoned his position in *Companhia de Petróleo Anglo-Mexicana* and became one of the elements connecting in Rio de Janeiro the military who would lead the 1930 Revolution and the Bahian conspirators.⁹ Discontent with the directions of the negotiations which resulted in the October movement, the young Antônio Bonfim joined the Revolutionary Action League (LAR), a grouping created by Prestes in July 1930, in Argentina (Carone, 1978, pp. 328-332; 1982, pp. 233-234; Rodrigues, in Fausto, 1993, p. 370; Vianna, 2007, pp. 71, 112-115). Until then he received a salary of 1,200,000 per month

as a teacher hired by the oil company and was one of the founders of LAR, discussing with Prestes and Silo Meirelles (1900-1957) the group's initial manifesto. After this, he was the secretary of the league in Bahia, until its dissolution and the rupture with its leader in December 1930 (Waack, 1993, p. 65).

On 15 September 1930, Antônio Maciel Bonfim was arrested in the city of Alagoinhas, accused of communist subversion. Also detained were the workers Manoel Ribeiro and João Pacífico de Souza, suspected of helping Bonfim carry out subversive propaganda among workers in Salvador and Alagoinhas, as well as holding a communist meeting at an address in Maçaranduba, attended by more than 50 people. According to the investigations, Antônio, Manoel, and João composed the leadership group of LAR in Bahia. Brought to the Police Station of the Second District, Maciel declared that he was a communist, adding that he corresponded with Prestes and other individuals. In his possession the police found "various compromising documents," including a letter addressed by Bonfim to a friend. The teacher found the silence of *Cavaleiro da Esperança* (Knight of Hope – the pseudonym of Prestes) strange, who had not responded to his last letters, including one in which he demanded a subvention. He answered: "If you cannot take action in this state capital, I will adopt another destiny with my revolutionary ideas."¹⁰

Antônio Maciel was identified in the police files of the Secretariat of Police and Public Security of the State of Bahia on 19 September as number 4608. On 27 September, *Diário de Notícias* announced the release of Bonfim, Manoel Ribeiro, and João Pacífico, until then under arrest and incommunicable, due to a *habeas corpus* filed by Major Cosme de Farias (1875-1972), a notorious defender of social causes.¹¹ Freed, Antônio travelled to Alagoinhas, hiding there, since he feared new persecutions. As incredible as it may seem, the Revolution then came to meet the *Prestista* activist. On 24 October, a column of mutinous soldiers, commanded by Captain Agildo Barata (1905-1968) entered the city in victory (Barata, 1978, p. 145; Barros, 1979, p. 205). The young Bonfim presented himself to the rebel forces, but diverged from the Alliance. He remained under arrest for two months in the house of a sister. Shortly afterwards, he disappeared from under the watchful eyes of his relatives.

He reemerged on 21 July 1931, when he was arrested in the city of Rio de Janeiro, accused of being a ‘dangerous communist.’ A week later, he made a declaration to *Delegado* João Castelo Branco, from the Fourth Auxiliary Police Station. He alleged he was called *Américo de Carvalho*, son of João Matias de Carvalho and Maria Carvalho, and to be from the state of Sergipe. In relation to other questions, he said he was 26, was single, was employed in commerce, and lived on Rua Salvador Correia. After signing the *Auto de Qualificação*, (Identification Report) he was released. On 22 January 1932, “for being recognizably communist,” and still using the pseudonym *Américo de Carvalho*, he was arrested again. The following day, after making being interrogated by *Delegado* João Castelo Branco, he was sent to the *Casa de Detenção* and on 1 April transferred to the Correctional Colony of Dois Rios, on Ilha Grande, off the coast of Rio de Janeiro state.¹²

After LAR ended, Antônio Bonfim sought to join the PCB. According to Basbaum (1983, p. 75; 1976, pp. 138-139), at the beginning of 1932, the central committee of the party received a “strange letter from Paraná” from someone claiming to be a member of LAR. The signatory claimed to have been arrested in Bahia and deported to Uruguay, but managed to escape the guards in the Southern state. The letter writer requested help and asked to join the communist ranks. He signed the letter Américo Maciel Bonfim, a name unknown to the leaders of the party who, considering the *Prestista* of the applicant, did not accept him. In Ilha Grande, Basbaum met Bonfim, who overcame the initial suspicions and gained the trust of many comrades. A well-spoken ‘braggart,’ he said, in the middle of the report of his “incredible adventures,” that he was a teacher (of ‘first letters’) in Bahia and wanted to join the party. In November 1932, Bonfim escaped in the company of the communists José Desidério and José Caetano Machado. After this, he joined the PCB, and rose meteorically in the party structure, climbing through intermediate positions, and becoming general secretary in July 1934 (Basbaum, 1976, p. 139; Dulles, 1977, pp. 402-403; Lima, 1982, pp. 168-169).

The notable rise of Antônio Maciel Bonfim within the party apparatus is explained in part by the changes determined by the Communist International (Comintern) in the alliance policy of affiliated parties. According to Dulles

(1977, p. 340), at the beginning of the 1930s, in a meeting in Moscow, the *Presidium* of the Executive Committee of Comintern, led by Dimitri Manuilski (1883-1959), instructed revolutionary organizations to “break the umbilical cord which tied them to bourgeois class society.” Manuilski demanded from the Latin American communist parties “a radical transformation of all daily practice, towards an independent class politics.” He criticized the practices which he believed had caused the ‘degeneration’ of Latin American worker and peasant blocs into parties ‘parallel’ to the communist ones. The PCB received the serious denunciation of collaboration, “in the disguise of a workers’ and peasants’ bloc,” with the Prestes Column. Manuilski’s directive was the slogan of the Buenos Aires Conference of the South American Secretariat of Comintern, held in April and May 1930. As well as considering the ‘deviations of the right’ of its leaders and the position to be assumed by the Brazilian section towards a new *tenentista* revolt, the Secretariat emphasized the need to ‘proletarianize’ the PCB. In other words, evidence can be found in the conference of the extreme devotion to *workerism*, a policy adopted by the party and responsible for the elevation of ‘genuine workers’ to positions of leadership. Notwithstanding the reduced number of intellectuals in the higher ranks of the PCB, leaders such as Astrogildo Pereira (1890-1965), Otávio Brandão (1896-1980), and Leôncio Basbaum (1907-1969), accused of ‘rightwing deviations’ and of belonging to the petty bourgeoisie, were removed from the central committee or fell into disgrace (Basbaum, 1976, pp. 93-94; Brandão, 1978, pp. 378-381; Dulles, 1977, pp. 339-340).

The changes determined by Comintern affected the leadership of the PCB and created a climate in which *workerism* thrived. As a consequence, the central committee experienced great instability until the 1934 National Congress. In November 1930, an expanded meeting removed Astrogildo Pereira from the position of general secretary. Chosen to replace Astrogildo in January 1931 was Heitor Ferreira Lima (1905-1989), a tailor and trade unionist, recently arrived in Brazil after spending three years in the Soviet Union, studying in the Leninist School. Despite the respective curriculum, Heitor was dismissed as general secretary by Inês Guralski, representative of the South American Bureau of Comintern (BSA), who dispatched him to the Northeast. As interim

secretary, the doctor Fernando de Lacerda (1891-1957) assumed the position. In the middle of the conflicts which split the small and ephemeral central committee between January and March 1932, Lacerda, alleging cardiac complications and as he was not an authentic member of the proletariat, presented the name of the metallurgical worker José Vilar (*Miguel*) for the position (Dulles, 1977, pp. 366, 368, 389, 395; Lima, 1982, pp. 139-148; Basbaum, 1976, pp. 76-77, 94, 109, 111, 115).

The police also created trouble for the PCB. In São Paulo, during the month of May 1932, a strike of various types of workers (footwear workers, railway workers, glaziers, printers, weavers, etc.) gave the forces of repression the opportunity to destroy the central committee of the party, then led by José Caetano Machado. The police detained the new general secretary, as well as Leôncio Basbaum and the trade unionists Roberto Morena (1902-1978) and Mário Grazini (1898-1958). The remnants of the leadership sought to organize themselves in Rio de Janeiro. In November a new general secretary was elected: the print worker Duvitiliano Ramos (*Freitas*). For the Secretary of Agitation and Propaganda the weaver Domingos Brás (*Mauro* or *Jarbas*) was chosen. Before the end of the year, Brás took over as general secretary, due to the arrest of Duvitiliano. At the invitation of *Mauro*, Bonfim became a sort of adviser to the central committee (Basbaum, 1976, pp. 122-123, 140-141; Del Roio, in Ridenti; Reis, 2007, p. 49; Dulles, 1977, pp. 397-398, 403-404).

Paradoxically, although the PCB sought 'genuine workers,' literary affinities also united Bonfim, *Freitas*, and *Mauro*. An old communist activist and candidate for federal deputy in the March 1930 elections in the state of Rio de Janeiro, on the Peasant and Workers Slate (BOC), the black worker Duvitiliano Ramos wrote novels and did historical research for which he could not find a publisher. In relation to Domingos Brás, also a candidate for a seat in the Congress for BOC, he was a poet who survived exile to the Penal Colony of Colônia Penal de Clevelândia do Norte, moving from anarchism to communism – in February 1929, the anarchist newspaper *Ação Direta* published an article signed by Brás (Dulles, 1977, pp. 337, 360; Brandão, 1978, p. 272).

In turn, Vianna (2007, p. 72) highlighted that at the beginning of 1933, the South American Bureau sent a delegation to Brazil, charged with

organizing member education courses. Who stood out in these classes were Antônio Maciel Bonfim and Lauro Reginaldo da Rocha (1908-1991), code-named *Bangu*, who were coopted by the party leadership during an expanded meeting of the central committee of the PCB with the ‘instructors’ of BSA. *Bangu* was chosen as general secretary until the organization’s congress or conference – held in July 1934 which raised Bonfim to the top of the Brazilian section of Comintern. In addition to the general secretary, the central committee of the PCB consisted, amongst others, of Honório de Freitas Guimarães (*Martins*), *Bangu*, and Adelino Deícola dos Santos (*Tampinha*). While exercising the position, the Bahian came to be known as *Miranda* – also adopting the pseudonyms *Adalberto de Andrade Fernandes*, *Queiroz* (or *Keiros*), and *Tavares* (Abreu et al., 2001, pp. 704-705).

‘THE FAMOUS *MIRANDA*’

Held in Niterói, the July 1934 National Conference chose the delegates to the VII Comintern Congress, to be held the same year. *Miranda*, *Bangu*, José Caetano Machado (*Alencar*), Valdevino de Oliveira (*Divino*), Fernando de Lacerda, and Elias da Silva (*André*) composed the Brazilian delegation (Dulles, 1977, p. 418; Lima, 1982, pp. 183-184; Vianna, 2007, p. 75; Waack, 1993, p. 70). In Moscow, Bonfim met Prestes again, exiled in the Soviet Union since November 1931. As the general secretary acknowledged in his biography deposited in Moscow, dated 7 November 1934, the divergences between them emerged with the dissolution of LAR (Waack, 1993, p. 65).

Notwithstanding the animosity with Bonfim, relations between Prestes and the PCB were already conflictual. Actually, the paths of the military commander and the leftwing organization crossed after a friendly meeting between the *tenentista* leader and Astrogildo Pereira, in December 1927, in Puerto Suarez, Bolivia. The party’s interest in recruiting Prestes was more evident in May 1929, when Paulo de Lacerda (1893-1967) and Leôncio Basbaum contacted the captain who had established a residency in Buenos Aires. According to Prestes’ version, Lacerda presented the PCB program and invited him to be the party’s candidate in the 1930 presidential elections. Alleging fidelity to the other

tenentes, Prestes refused the invitation (Moraes; Viana, 1997, pp. 54-56). However, according to the narrative of Basbaum, Prestes, Antônio de Siqueira Campos (1898-1930), and Juarez Távora (1898-1975) considered the PCB program to the “too radical,” since it mentioned, amongst other points, “annulling our foreign debts,” which seemed to them to be “absurd and reckless” (Basbaum, 1976, pp. 68-72).

However, in June 1930, the PCB was instructed by Comintern to prepare for the revolution, maintain distance from military revolts, and to avoid ‘*Prestista* infiltration’ into the party. Party leaders thus began to expose the petty bourgeoisie deviations of the *Cavaleiro da Esperança*. According to the analysis prepared by the communists, Prestes did not mention the leading role of the proletariat in the Brazilian revolution and wanted to put himself above classes and political parties. In relation to LAR, it was seen as a party destined to repeat the experience of *Kuomintang*, which led by General Chiang Kai-shek (1887-1975) massacred the Chinese communists, previously their allies, in April 1927. Even after dissolving LAR and publishing on 12 March 1931, a letter in which he attacked the political line of Comintern, Prestes continued to be seen as an adversary of the party, due to the popularity which he enjoyed among the masses not used to the revolutionary struggle (Carone, 1982, pp. 83-96; Dulles, 1977, pp. 340-342, 348-349, 352, 376, 380-381).

In July 1934 in the Soviet Union, Prestes sought the support of Manuilski, willing to resolve his situation as a communist without a party. The latter verified the Brazilian correspondence and found that the central committee maintained its opposition to the soldier joining the organization. “Showing himself to be upset, he punched the table and said: ‘Send the telegram! Publish immediately that Luiz Carlos Prestes is a member of the PCB!’ ... And so it was done” (Prestes *apud* Vianna, 2007, p. 120). In another statement, the veteran leader recognized the pressure exercised by Comintern on the Brazilian section: “The outcome of the negotiations was very simple: Manuilski punched the tables and said that I would join the party no matter what. Miranda could not avoid the determination of Comintern” (Prestes *apud* Moraes; Viana, 1997, p. 79).

However, Waack (1993, p. 58) highlighted that the ultimatum from Moscow to the Brazilian section preceded July 1934. On 11 March of the same year,

a meeting of the members of the political secretariat of the “General Staff of the World Revolution” approved a resolution asking the PCB to admit Prestes. The same day, a telegram was sent to the Brazilian central committee taking the deliberations into account, waiting for an urgent response and ordering his affiliation to be published in the party press. Moscow found the lack of a prompt response strange and demanded that it be complied with in nine telegrams – 17 April, 14 May, and 11 June. The central committee resisted as much as it could, but on 1 August 1934, *A Classe Operária* published an article by Prestes, entitled “The Red Army in 1934.” On 12 September of the same year, the party’s press published in a brief note the affiliation of Luiz Carlos Prestes to the Communist Party of Brazil.¹³

Using Brazilian passport number 3805, in the name of Adalberto de Andrade Fernandes, *Miranda* left for Europe at the beginning of September 1934, heading the Brazilian delegation called to participate in the VII Congress of Comintern – later postponed to the following year. Taking advantage of the presence of Latin American representatives in Moscow, between 16-28 October, the Third Conference of Communist Parties of Southern America and the Caribbean was held (Waack, 1993, pp. 69-73; Vianna, 2007, p. 145). In relation to the point in discussion, it should be noted that the bulletins presented by Bonfim in the “meetings in Moscow” and their developments during the risings of November 1935 still feed battles of memory and historiographic discussions (Cf. Lima, 1982, pp. 184-186; Morais, 2008, pp. 83-84; Prestes, 2008, pp. 73-77; Vianna, 2007, pp. 145-152). In general terms, despite the historic reassessments, Prestes’ version is still influential, according to which “there was no guidance from Moscow for the insurrection to occur. The responsibility is of our party and the general secretary, *Miranda*, who transmitted false information about what was happening” (Prestes *apud* Moraes; Viana, 1997, p. 83).

According to Vianna (2007, pp. 146-148), the opinions which the Brazilians presented in Moscow were extremely exaggerated, or in party jargon, ‘bulwarks,’ asserting the leading role of the PCB in the ongoing strikes in the country. *Miranda*, using the pseudonym *Queiroz*, in the bulletin “On the eve of the Revolution in Brazil,” not only confirmed the influence of the Brazilian section in the working class strikes and in the police, notably the peasant

masses who began started fights through the *cangaceiro* guerrillas. It should be noted that in April 1934, Prestes also had considered *Lampião* and his band of “peasant insurrectionists.” According to the *tenentista* leader, the PCB could have led them along a better path and the conscious struggle for their class interests, in the perspective of a great movement against feudalism and imperialism. In relation to *Miranda*, the exaggerations were justified to generate ‘revolutionary enthusiasm.’ If the errors of assessment of the Brazilian scenario were not exclusively those of the PCB, Bonfim added the ingredients of his exuberant fantasy. And the more he exaggerated the revolutionary mobilization of the masses and the strength of the party, the better it was greeted by Manuiski. According to Prestes, the strong man of the Comintern did not tire of repeating: “Ah, if we had in Europe a political secretary who knew this party like this young man knows it!...” (Prestes apud Vianna, 2007, p. 148).

Considering the *strategies of illusion* about the global revolution and the developments of the revolutionary process which many believed to be underway in Brazil during the 1920s and 1930s, Pinheiro (1992, p. 233) relativized the role performed by the ‘bulwark bulletins’ of *Miranda* in the Moscow meetings. According to him, to the contrary of the puerile version according to which it was the inexact and triumphalist information of Bonfim that led to the involvement of Comintern, the road opened since 1928 which led to the 1935 insurrections was paved on the basis of delirious and megalomaniac analyses, which removed some layers from the concrete reality and magnified them to place the communists at the height of the roles to be performed. Thus, to be “at the height of the events,” the discourse moved from reality and reached towards the sky to achieve the desired effect. “When the premises are illusions, the conclusion has to be equally illusory.”

Nevertheless, based on the meetings held in the Soviet capital, Manuiski accepted the return of Prestes to Brazil and highlighted ‘advisers’ – including Arthur Ewert (1890-1959), Rodolfo Ghioldi (1897-1985), and Olga Benario (1908-1942) –, who helped the local communists in the preparations to take power. However, the high level connections did not calm the suspicions existing between Prestes and *Miranda*. As Vianna highlighted (2007, p. 152), the relations that covered the rivalry between the General Secretary of the PCB and his

old guide in LAR influenced the events of 1935. On the one hand, Prestes was convinced that he had returned to direct the revolution. On the other, although enthusiastic with the direction of events – in part created by his fertile imagination –, for *Miranda* revolution was not on the agenda of the day. The commander of the *Coluna Invicta* had to reach an understanding with the leader of the party who had refused his entrance of the organization. According to Prestes' version, the antagonism was evident in Moscow when Manuilski praised his figure and his role. "He exalted him more than Miranda and this created a disagreeable environment" (Prestes apud Vianna, 2007, p. 152).

The analysis of the evidence investigated demonstrated much more heated competition than the general of the column recognized in the interviews conceded during the final years of his life. According to Waack (1993, pp. 184-187), in the two months before the insurrections of November 1935, the general secretary of the PCB experienced a personal crisis of authority. *Miranda* even wrote a letter to the Latin American Secretariat, asking to be removed from the leadership and to return to working at a grass roots level, preferentially in the military sector. Although he was described as a braggart, loudmouth, and inconsequent, the Bahian revolutionary had the sense to perceive that in the future, Prestes would give the orders. Johann de Graaf (1894-1980), also known as *Franz Gruber*, reproduced an exchange of insults between the secretary and the *tenentista* leader, which occurred at the beginning of November 1935. "The head of the party is me," said *Miranda*. "Soon I will command here in Brazil and give the orders," Prestes retorted. Feeling under pressure, the leader adopted the posture of not admitting any contestation which came from below, which fed the resentment of *Martins* and *Bangu*. Actually, *Miranda* returned from Moscow changed, abandoning his collective style of work, irritated when a comrade did not share his point of view.

In the conflict with Prestes, and who knows defending the position of general secretary or assuring a place in a future revolutionary order, *Miranda* began to sign with variations of his own name the texts he published in *A Classe Operária*. In the issue of 10 April 1935, under them surname Bonfim, he congratulated the strike of the Leste Brasileiro railway workers in Bahia. On 1 May, he used another variant: A. Bonfim. In the 20 June issue, he signed as

A. Maciel Bonfim (Miranda) an article about the imperialist wars. In the same issue, the central organ of the PCB explained to its members and sympathizers that comrade *Miranda* would now sign his articles in the newspaper with the name A. Maciel Bonfim.¹⁴ In the following months, the lackeys of Filinto Müller (1900-1973) must have thanked the administration of *A Classe Operária* for the opportune clarification.

The conflicts between *Miranda* and Prestes called the attention of the leaders of Comintern, who sought solutions for this impasse. In the organization's VII Congress, held between 25 July and 20 August 1935, the general secretary of the PCB was elected to the Executive Committee (EKKI). Unfortunately, the Bahian revolutionary did not return to Moscow to collect card number 32, in the name of *Antonio Queiroz* (a pseudonym adopted by the Soviets in contacts with Bonfim). Entering the World Revolution club meant that *Miranda* had the same hierarchical position as Prestes, although the personal and political prestige of the *Cavaleiro da Esperança* was incomparably greater (Waack, 1993, pp. 184-185).

The limits of this paper prevent a satisfactory approach to the November 1935 risings, which occurred in Natal, Recife, and Janeiro. Nevertheless, it should be noted that news of the fighting in the Northeast reached the federal capital on Sunday, 24 November. In Prestes' version, when he became aware of the events, he sought out *Miranda*, since he would not admit taking such a serious decision in the absence of the general secretary. According to the *tenentista*, *Miranda* was also informed of the risings on Sunday, but only entered into contact with the party leadership and the envoys of Comintern in the afternoon of the following day. After intense discussion and based on an argument according to which an insurrection in Rio de Janeiro would strengthen the ongoing movements, the principal characters agreed with a plan that involved military uprisings and the mobilization of workers, which was to occur on the night of the 26th and the morning of the 27th November. According to Prestes, the final decision was unanimous and "who wavered most was *Miranda*" (Vianna, 2007, pp. 321, 323-327).

YEARS OF TORMENT (1936-1940)

With the failure of the November 1935 insurrections, the Vargas administration intensified the persecution of opponents of all types, notably the communists. On 13 January 1935, the general secretary of the PCB was arrested, at room number 11 of the *Apartamentos Vilela* Building, located at 606 Av. Paulo de Frontin. In his company were his partner, Elvira Copello Calonio (*Elza Fernandes*), and the communist activist Pedro Luís Teixeira.¹⁵ Brought to the Special Police Station for Public and Social Security (DESPS), he was identified three times as *Adalberto de Andrade Fernandes*, *Américo de Carvalho* and, finally, Antônio Maciel Bonfim (Brasil, 1936, p. 52).

Miranda was badly tortured and during his interrogations confronted with the voluminous documentation found in his house and in the *aparelhos* (rooms) occupied by Ewert and Prestes. In relation to police violence, Deputy Octávio da Silveira (1895-1966) adduced as one of the reasons for the concession of *habeas corpus* on behalf of Adalberto Fernandes and Clóvis de Araújo Lima the fact that “the patients have been and are been beaten daily.”¹⁶ Similarly, the political prisoners in the *Casa de Detenção* (a type of prison), denounced in a letter sent to President Getúlio Vargas the arbitrary acts committed by police chiefs and the agents of DESPS against the general secretary of the PCB. According to the authors of the memorial, Antônio Bonfim was repeatedly hit with rubber pipes, punched, and kicked, between 13 and 19 January. “These beatings were followed by torture, including needles being stuck under his nails. All these continued until he lost consciousness.”¹⁷

As Vianna highlighted (2007, p. 382), the general secretary adopted the strategy of confirming everything the police already knew and remaining silent when he could provide new information. He thereby clarified the codenames which appeared on the documents that had been apprehended, but was silent about the existence of Ghioldi and Olga Benario. According to Waack (1993, pp. 284, 287), Bonfim’s initial resistance to the beatings saved the leadership of the PCB from a catastrophe. If he or *Elza* had talked during the initial hours of torture, the police could have picked up the party’s leaders all at once. In fact, no important member of the party’s hierarchy was found by the police

during the following two years, notwithstanding the repressive wave, supported by legal instruments and a furious anti-communist climate.

Embittered by the suspicion of his comrades, Bonfim was also concerned about the disappearance of his companion. There is no precise information about how the general secretary met Elvira Copello Calonio,¹⁸ a young woman whose age in 1936 was between 16 and 21 (varying according to the source investigated), illiterate, the youngest of four children, children of poor peasants, who became orphans very early. Her three siblings, including the oldest Luís, were members of the PCB. *Miranda* and *Elza* had lived together since the middle of 1935 and the young women knew the central characters involved in the Rio de Janeiro uprising, which would be revealed to be tragic for her existence (Waack, 1993, pp. 187-188).

On 25 or 26 January 1936, *Elza* was released. She carried notes from *Miranda*, in which he warned that the party's leadership was known to the police and asked that his companion be given shelter. Elvira's contacts were dangerous, since she would constantly go to the police station to visit her husband and leave to look for members of the PCB, carrying messages. The party leadership began to suspect that *Garota*, as she was known, was working for the police. Moreover, Prestes would not believe that the police allowed meetings between *Miranda* and his wife, nor that he could send letters through his intermediary. He even suspected the handwriting of the notes, which he believed to have been forged by the police. "Prestes, indignant, convinced himself of the existence of a plot set up by the police to demoralize the party and that *Elza* was the conscious instrument of this provocation" (Vianna, 2007, pp. 388-389).

The leaders of the PCB brought *Elza* to the house of Adelino Deícola dos Santos (*Tampinha*), in the Carioca neighborhood of Deodoro, at the same time that they interrogated her and discussed her destiny. A significant part of February was consumed by a nervous correspondence between the leadership of the PCB and Prestes. The latter insisted on the thesis of police provocation and suggested the physical elimination of *Garota*. However, the party leadership were reluctant to carry out the macabre 'task'. An analysis of the set of evidence available indicates that in the letter of 18 February, in which Prestes deplored

the “lack of resolution” of the national secretariat of a traitor, sealed *Elza*’s destiny. “The question was put in a simple form by the general of the column: they were in a war and in a war deserters and traitors were submitted to summary judgment and eliminated” (Vianna, 2007, p. 395). At the end of February or the beginning of March 1936, *Miranda*’s companion was strangled by Francisco Natividade Lyra (*Cabeção*), helped by *Martins*, Eduardo Ribeiro Xavier (*Abóbora*), *Tampinha*, and Manoel Severiano Cavalcanti (*Gaguinho*). Following this her body was put in a sack and buried in the garden of where Deícola lived (Vianna, 2007, pp. 389-395). On 3 March, Prestes demanded and obtained from Honório the correspondence about the *Elza case*. However, the compromising messages fell into the hands of the police on 5 March, due to the arrest of the *tenentista* leader (Waack, 1993, p. 300).

In its 2 April 1936 issue, the newspaper *Estado da Bahia* established the true identity of the general secretary of the PCB and published biographical data about the Bahian revolutionary. In the following days, the newspaper published other reports, including an interview with the *bacharel* Pedro Bonfim.¹⁹ This ‘scoop’ was echoed in the federal capital and the information about the early life of Antônio Bonfim was transcribed in the Carioca press.²⁰ By an irony of history, thanks to the investigative journalism of the Bahian newspaper, the police managed to establish the data lacking in the biographical outline of the communist leader. On 5 April, in the Headquarters of the Civil Police of the Federal District, *Miranda*, now described as Antônio Maciel Bonfim, was questioned by the *delegado* Eurico Bellens Porto.²¹

On 24 November 1936, Bonfim was accused, based on Law no. 38, dated 4 April 1935 (which defined crimes against the political and social order), of communist subversion. On 5 May 1937, he was sentenced by the Court of National Security (TSN) to four years and four months’ imprisonment. The appeal made by his lawyer was judged by the Supreme Military Court (STM), on 13 September of the same year, which confirmed the TSN’s sentences of the leaders of the November 1935 movement. Transferred to the prison in Fernando de Noronha on 13 December 1938, he returned to Rio de Janeiro on 29 March 1940 to treat his health in Ilha Grande prison. Finally, after four years, six months and six days’ imprisonment, he was released on 19 July 1940.²²

However, before being put at liberty, the general secretary of the PCB had to deal with the outcome of the *Elza case*. In March and April 1940, many members of the central committee of the PCB (amongst whom were *Martins*, *Bangu* and *Abóbora*) were arrested. On 17 April, based on the confession of the party leaders (obtained by torture), the police discovered the place of burial, exhumed Elvira's body – in the presence of the victim's older brother – and reconstituted the crime, a ritual covered by the newspapers, filmed and exhibited in the country's cinemas. The execution of *Garota* provided ample material for the anti-communism 'industry' in Brazil (Motta, 2002, pp. 161-178). Despite being condemned by the Court of National Security to 30 years in prison for ordering the murder, Prestes was released in April 1945, following the amnesty of the political prisoners of the *Estado Novo*. Until the end of his long life, the commander of the *Coluna Invicta* peremptorily denied having ordered the death of *Elza* (Moraes; Viana, 1997, pp. 116-117).

As highlighted by Vianna (2007, p. 395), it was only after he discovered about the murder of his companion that *Miranda* began to collaborate with the police. On 20 April, *A Noite* published a long interview with the former general secretary of the PCB. Here, he revealed details about his amorous relationship and his intention for a future marriage, aborted by the death of *Elza*. Bonfim mentioned aspects of his professional trajectory and his political formation, declaring that he had been a revolutionary since 1922. He stressed that he had asked to resign as general secretary twice: the first before the November 1935 movement (he judged that the Brazilian situation “would not be resolved by the rising of a regiment”); and the second time after his arrest. During the meeting, *Miranda* wrote a letter to his brother-in-law Luís, in which he showed himself to be moved by the discovery of the body of his companion and explained his motives for the breach with the organic activities, the members, and the methods of the party. Finally, he repeated: “Elvira did not inform to the police, did not give declarations, was not at the service of the Police; she died innocent, innocent as she always lived...”²³

THE GHOST OF *MIRANDA*

According to Vianna (2007, p. 395), when he left prison Antônio Maciel Bonfim, was suffering from tuberculosis, had lost a kidney due to the beatings, and was in absolute poverty. Edmundo Moniz (1911-1997) managed to get the former leader a job as a reviser in a newspaper. In June 1941, Antônio completed an article entitled “Some economic aspects of Bahia,” apprehended by DESPS.²⁴ It was not a subversive pamphlet, but a paper ordered by the journal *Cultura Política*. That year this periodical launched the section “Work and the national economy,” “aimed at an expanded study of the problems of labor, wealth, and national production.” In September the text appeared in the seventh issue of the publication. However, since the section consisted of editorial articles, the responsibility of “a body of editors specialized in the subjects of the economy, labor, and production,” the name of the author was omitted – depriving Bonfim of recognition for the writing of the pamphlet.²⁵

The information about Antônio Bonfim in the years following the completion of the sentence handed down by the TSN are scarce or missing. In his memories, Lacerda (1977, pp. 37 and 50) alluded to having met the former leader at a dinner in Rio de Janeiro in the middle of the 1940s, when he still wrote the *Tribuna da Imprensa* column for *Correio da Manhã*. *Miranda* was thin and aged, having become a Catholic and was working as an employee in union of construction material manufacturing or sales. According to other authors, Bonfim returned to Bahia, dying in Alagoinhas a short time later (Morais, 2008, p. 299; Vianna, 2007, p. 396; Waack, 1993, p. 346).

But something can still be evidenced about the final years of the communist leader. Imprecisions about the date and place of death of Antônio Maciel Bonfim appear to have been elucidated following the discovery of an article by Fr. Arlindo Vieira (1897-1963), published in the 7 May 1947 issue of *Correio da Manhã*. Rev. Arlindo, a Catholic intellectual and fervent anti-Catholic, in the middle of an obituary “the companion of Elza Fernandes,” notified that *Miranda* had died on 2 April of the same year, when he was gravely sick in *Casa de Saúde São José*, a hospital in Rio de Janeiro. According to the priest, Bonfim died piously, “given all the sacraments of the Church.”²⁶ Due to one

more irony of the muse Clio, news of his death appeared on the same day as the Superior Electoral Court cancelled the registration of the PCB.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

By way of a conclusion, it should be highlighted that, contemplating the convoluted trajectory of the central character of this article, it is no surprise that the image of *Miranda* is still the subject of intense controversies, both related to the writing of memorials and in the historiography of Brazilian left-wing organizations. However, the continuous historical revision of the events in which he was a protagonist (for example the 1935 risings) involves recomposing his biography. In relation to this, as emphasized by Dosse (2009, p. 11), writing a life is an inaccessible horizon. Nevertheless, it stimulates the need to narrate and understand. Since Antiquity, all generations have accepted the biographic road, using the instrument available. However, biographers incessantly write the same lives, highlight identical figures, since documental gaps, new questions, and new clarifications constantly emerge. The biographic genre, like historical knowledge, is written first in the present, resulting in even stronger implications when there is empathy on the part of the author. In summary: “Biography can be a privileged element in the reconstitution of an epoch, with its dreams and anguish.” Thus, recomposing the trajectory of Antônio Maciel Bonfim allowed a questioning of some of the obstacles interposed to historian when they face the *biographic challenge*.

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NOTES

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⁵ Ibidem.

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¹⁸ In relation to *Miranda's* companion, it is known that her first name was Elvira. However, in the sources and references consulted, her surnames are written in various forms: Ca-

ppello Colon; Copello Calonio; Cupello Calonio; Cupelo Calonio; Cupelo Coloni; and Cupelo Colônio (Cf. Rose, 2001, p. 255).

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