

## **A Brazil the History Books Won't Show**

Written by Carlos Chagas

Friday, 19 November 2004 10:29

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Once in a while it's good to dive back into the past, which never tells us what to do but always teaches us what to avoid. November 15 was the anniversary of the proclamation of the Republic.

Accounts from history books handed down to our youth appear full of excessive patriotism, heroism, as well as detachment; as, by the way, in several other episodes of our nation's existence.

Things ought to be put back in the right place. The Republic was proclaimed by chance, a by-product of a military coup ignited with the sole purpose of having the Emperor oust the Prime Minister.

### **Military Men Should Disappear**

The army was on frontstage, since the Paraguay War. Victorious, officers returned from the swamps willing to occupy the space worthy of their significance.

The Civil Government - elitist and aristocratic - didn't find that very amusing, and barons and viscounts began to treat the commanders and their troops with certain hostility. They viewed the men in uniform as a force that no longer should be.

The Army had fulfilled its duties, winning another war, and they should disappear or be loyal to the royals and the oligarchy, the good old Brazil of the previous days.

The empire had suffered a profound impact by losing support of land owners, who were not over the fact that slavery had been abolished.

Later, the Church jumped ship, as a result of the arrest of two bishops engaged in following the

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Popeâ€™s instructions, proscribing the Maçonaria (a secret society whose chief endeavor was to spread the principles of fraternity and philanthropy).

The third leg cut off from the tripod, the Army, was a growing insurgence against the discrimination from the holders of an ever more fleeting power.

Fact or fiction, Prime Minister Ouro Preto was considering dismantling the Army and let the old-fashioned National Guard take control, whereby every land owner was bestowed with the rank of â€œcolonelâ€, â€œmajorâ€, or â€œcaptainâ€.

Shortly prior to the slavery abolition, real generals had refused to serve as backwoods-captains, chasing slaves on the run.

On November 14, two regiments and one battalion of SÃ£o CristovÃ£o departed from headquarters, to occupy the Santana Camp, in front of the War Ministry.

They declared themselves in rebellion against the Prime Minister, positioning their cannons - obviously not intending to fire - to force Emperor D. Pedro II to make changes in the cabinet.

In the wee-wee hours of November 15, perplexity was in the air. Major-commanders among the rebellious, not knowing what to do, realized the lack of a heavy-weight name to serve as leader, capable of setting off Ouro Pretoâ€™s dismissal.

They recalled that not far from where they were, in a small humble house, resided Deodoro da Fonseca, hero of the battles in Paraguay, former Army commander of Rio Grande do Sul, whose military career had been terminated by the Civil Government.

They knocked on his door only to be greeted by the Marshalâ€™s wife with a broom stick at hand, calling them hooligans. Manoel would not see them. Manoel was her husbandâ€™s name, sick, 104-degrees fever brought on by arrhythmia, the ancient denomination for asthma

and bronchitis.

Deodoro told the officers to come in and listened to the lie that - on that same day - Ouro Preto would sign a decree dismantling the Army. Exasperated, he agreed to lead them in the effort to bring down the cabinet.

He was a friend of the Emperor, with whom he often would correspond, despite being relegated to ostracism. A week earlier, heâ€™d received the visit of a group of republican men that would have fit in a van, had vans been around then.

He was preemptive in refusing to take part in the insipid movement. Brazil would only accept a Republic after the passing of the Emperor and the throne relinquished to Princess Isabel, married to count Dâ€™Eu. Hence, we could not be governed by the French.

### â€œIn Paraguay We Fought the Paraguayansâ€

Nonetheless, determined to overthrow Ouro Preto, the Marshal put on his uniform. Weakened, he could barely mount the golden horse made available to him.

A horse buggy was brought, and for SÃ£o CristovÃ£o they headed, where new troops were arriving - as a matter of fact, with a marching band leading the wayâ€| They met up where the Mangue canal used to be. Deodoro turned around, moving toward the War Ministryâ€™s front yard.

In the old mansion, today replaced by the majestic building that for many decades remained as the War Ministry, Ouro Preto had gathered the entire cabinet, except Navy Minister Baron of LadÃ¡rio, who was late.

The Emperor was in the town of PetrÃ³polis. Telegraphs were already in use, and the Prime Minister asked His Majesty for his return to Rio to face off the crisis.

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From atop the sierra, in Petrópolis, D. Pedro II asked who the head of the rebellion was. He learned that Deodoro was the man: “Wait, Manoel is a friend of mine”

He then made up his mind to cede to the bayonets and sacrifice Ouro Preto, even requesting information as to the whereabouts of Senator Silveira Martins; the Emperor intended to name a new Prime Minister, silencing the movement.

Due to bad luck, “Gaspar”, the Senator’s first name, was traveling from Porto Alegre to Rio. He could not be located. Nevertheless, the Emperor climbed down the mountains, certain that everything would be taken care of. However, he had forgotten that Silveira Martins and Deodoro were foes.

Still from the windows of the War Ministry, Ouro Preto calls in the all-purpose-assistant - euphemism to identify Army Commander Marshal Floriano Peixoto. Pointing at the cannons on the other side, he exhorted the war hero to send out official army troops to attack and put an end to that adventure.

Across from the Ministry were battalions loyal to government. As Floriano appeared to hesitate, the Prime Minister recalled that in Paraguay, under more adverse conditions, rival troops were taken down between one discharge and the next.

That is when Brazil’s History was defined through a reply from Floriano, who was known as “Iron Marshal”: “Yes, dear Minister, but in Paraguay we were fighting Paraguayans”

It was dawn. In the War Ministry yard, enthused, Deodoro traded his horse buggy for a golden horse, moving forward with the rebel troops next to him.

The soldiers yelled “Viva Deodoro! Viva Deodoro!”, and the Marshal, in a peculiar gesture he’d adopted in Paraguay, responded by taking off and putting back on his beret,

while at the same time shouting, â€œViva the Emperor! Viva the Emperor!â€

There was no resistance. They all went up the steps leading up to the second floor, where Ouro Preto and its ministers were seated around a large table.

Neither the Prime Minister nor the others were cordial to rise up, the first mistake they committed.

Standing tall, Marshal Deodoro da Fonseca began to speak directly to Ouro Preto, stressing that the Army would not be humiliated, would not be dismantled, and that the replacement of the cabinet was in order.

**â€œYou all under arrest!â€**

The fever rose with all that action. The old hero got a little delirious from time to time, repeating over and over the same phrase: â€œWe sacrificed ourselves in the swamps of Paraguay and donâ€™t deserve this!â€

By the fifth or sixth recurrence, Ouro Preto, a courageous man with a short fuse, committed the second mistake. He pounded the table, shouting: â€œLook here, Marshal, greater sacrifice that Your Excellence accomplished in the swamps of Paraguay I am now embroiled in, listening to your crap!â€

The curtain came down. On top of his lungs, Deodoro ended the event forcefully: â€œyou all under arrest!â€ Down below, having arrived late, the Navy Minister was not able to come up.

One of his petty-assistants drew out a gun and was shot to death. Even the Minister was injured and placed on a burro-drawn trolley passing by. Taken to the hospital, he later recovered.

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It just so happens that, since the first morning hours, those few historic republicans had been moving about, knowing of the military uprising about to take place.

They were successful in reaching the War Ministryâ€™s lodge, amidst dozens of officers, listening to the dialogue between Deodoro and Ouro Preto.

Benjamin Constant, a Marshalâ€™s friend and pupil, Aristides Lobo, Quintino Bocaiãva, Rui Barbosa, and others approached Deodoro and tried to convince him that the opportunity to proclaim the Republic had come.

The experienced officer reacts with vehemence, speaks of his friendship to the Emperor, but learns of an already appointed Prime Minister, his personal enemy, Silveira Martins.

### Deodoro da Fonseca Puts an End to the Empire

The fever aggravates the irritation. Deodoro considers the option inadmissible, until the final argument: â€œYou know, Marshal, if the Republic is proclaimed it will be governed by a dictator, and this dictator is you?â€

History tells that his eyes opened wide. Less than an hour after scaling the steps of the War Ministry, the rebels came down, engulfed by shouts of euphoria and the paroxysm of the troops on guard at the bottom.

Deodoro again gets on his horse, again is saluted by the uniformed mass, and again - with the beret on-off routine - cries out repeatedly: â€œViva the Republic! Viva the Republic!â€ Also, he doesnâ€™t forget to shout, â€œViva the Army! Viva the Army!â€ , until an officer says something, and the Marshal completes: â€œViva the Navy!â€ â€œViva the Navy!â€

The Republic had been proclaimed, and according to Aristides Lobo, who later wrote in his memoirs, â€œthe people watched dumbfoundedâ€. There were no people.

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Following, the troops paraded through Direita Street (today Marshal Floriano Avenue) and Deodoro, tired, returned home. The news was slow to reach Ouvidor Street, from where leading newspaper operated.

By afternoon, at Rioâ€™s City Council, JosÃ© do PatrocÃ©nio gathers a small mass, saluting the end of the empire. They all made for the Marshalâ€™s home. The uproar awoke him; he opens the window and is surprised by the manifestation.

Conscious of having proclaimed the Republic, he hesitates for a moment, but eventually succumbs to the clamor of the people, which some journalists would later classify as the â€œsecond proclamation of the Republicâ€.

Shortly after, came the republicans, who under the leadership of Benjamin Constant and Rui Barbosa had spent a few hours in a meeting, discussing the Republicâ€™s preliminary decrees.

They convinced Deodoro to sign the articles, by which Brazil no longer constituted an empire, revoking the 1824 Constitution, extinguished noble titles, closed down the Senate and House of Representatives, disbanded political parties, and warranted the formation of a Constituent National Assembly, maintaining Deodoro, until then, as the Nationâ€™s interim President.

By train, from PetrÃ³polis, the Emperor had arrived in Rio early in the morning, waiting at the Quinta da Boa Vista Palace and being briefed by friends and messengers of developments taking place downtown.

He may have gotten depressed upon witnessing the Imperial Guard withdraw from the palace gardens. Later, he would welcome the Prime Minister, count of Ouro Preto, released by the new power owners.

At the Guanabara Palace, official residence of Princess Isabel, the routine didnâ€™t change.

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She and the husband, count dâ€™Eu, left early for a horseback ride through the sandy neighborhood known today as Botafogo.

They werenâ€™t aware of anything, but faced with the first accounts brought to their attention by frightened nobles, they quickly moved back to the Quinta Palace.

### They Wanted to Shoot the Imperial Family

During the long meeting at the Marshalâ€™s home, deep into the early hours of November 15, a thousand questions were raised; from the need to inform friend nations of the regime change - having the new government recognized - to the immediate necessity to communicate the old province presidents.

Major Sãlon Ribeiro, one of the more extreme republicans, had been in charge of communicating to the Emperor that Brazil had become a Republic, at the same time letting the royal family know they were being placed under arrest, barred from leaving the Quinta da Boa Vista.

The Major, upon returning, inquires as to what to do with Emperor D. Pedro II and relatives. He answered his own question: â€œLetâ€™s shoot them all, so that a spirit of power restoration cannot emerge!â€

Deodoroâ€™s reaction of irritation was visible, reminding again that the Emperor was a friend of his. He decided to give the royal family 48 hours to leave the country.

The interim President signs another decree, directing a portion of the National Treasure toward the support of the exiles abroad.

The offer would be refused the following day; D. Pedro II availed himself of the silverware, jewelry and other personal belongings to subsidize a frugal living in a modest Parisian hotel,

where he would live out his days.

A new problem was to be solved: Admiral Custódio de Mello, who adhered to the Republic in the Navy's name, reports that a passenger ship bound for Europe is anchored near Ilha Grande.

A navy boat was to transport the royal family to that ship. Again, one of those disgruntled meticulous observers of every kind of situation raised the question: "And under what flag will the Emperor travel to exile?"

Silence prevails. No one had given a thought to the Republic's flag, proclaimed in such haste. It would be a humiliation for the new regime to have the empire's flag on that ship's mast.

Deodoro's wife gives the solution. At the neighbor's house, even more modest than hers, lived a seamstress, called upon in a rush. They sketched out a new Brazilian flag, which the scared lady would sew up overnight.

### Like the American Flag

Replaced two weeks later by the current, the flag can still be seen at September 7 (Independence Day) parades, when spruced up privates stroll along with national symbols, starting with the Malta Cross, emblematic of the discovery of the land.

Coincidence or not, the flag had horizontal green and yellow stripes and some stars on the upper left-hand corner. Were it not for the different colors, without any addition, the "stars and stripes" - of our brothers to the North - would have been duplicated!

In regards to the proclamation of the Republic, yet another random episode got squeezed out, among the so many that would not fit in this article. On the coast and in the interior near the

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capital of the Empire, the provinces that became states were communicated immediately. But what to do with the Brazil of far away backcountry?

For an example, how to let Mato Grosso know of the transformation? The railroads did not connect - and still don't - Rio to Cuiabá. Roads didn't exist.

The capital of Mato Grosso could only be reached by boat, the sort that sailed down along the Brazilian coast conducting commerce at the ports, entering through the Prata estuary, passing by Buenos Aires, heading on up on the Paraná river, crisscrossing Argentina. Later, the Paraguay river, moving past Assunción, to finally penetrate Brazilian territory, navigating the Cuiabá river. The first ship left Rio in the end of November, 1889.

It took two and a half months to get to Cuiabá. It carried letters to the province's president, to relinquish power to the republicans. At the river docks, unfurled, was the Empire's flag, representing D. Pedro II in his best attire.

Days when a steam boat would come ashore were holidays. The appointed province president received the instructions from a coerced commander. He read, gasped, but regrouped his composure in cold blood to say: "I request to be accompanied to jail, to serve as witness."

Faced with the surprise from the commander's hand, he explained: "One week ago, I ordered the arrest of four republicans here in the province. They were causing too much turmoil. Let them go so I can pass on the control of the government to you."

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