

A HISTORIAN OF BRAZIL AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS: AN INTERVIEW WITH PROF. DR. CLODOALDO BUENO

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UN HISTORIADOR DE BRASIL Y DE LAS RELACIONES INTERNACIONALES: ENTREVISTA AL PROF. DR. CLODOALDO BUENO



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Question 1: We would like to start by asking you what led you to choose the History course as an undergraduate, as well as how you got on with your master's and doctorate in Economic History.

CB: I've always liked history. I worked in a registry office for five years, I was well adapted to my work environment, which even gave me contact with the judge, the prosecutor and lawyers. I became a clerk, I was doing well and was highly rated. For material reasons, I happily opted for the free History course at the College of Philosophy, Sciences and Letters of Marília (FAFI), then an isolated institute of higher education in the state of São Paulo, set up in 1959. I was lucky; I didn't know that I had entered an excellent undergraduate course. The teachers were excellent, both for their qualities and their honesty. They passed on values such as intellectual respect, examples of hard work, and were strict in their assessment of exams and written work. Everything was passed on without any ideological bias whatsoever. With the creation of UNESP in 1976, our FAFI was incorporated into it along with the other isolated institutes in our state. I graduated in 1966. I began my postgraduate studies in History under the terms of the so-called new regime, which was in force immediately after it was set up by USP in 1971. I obtained my master's (1974) and doctorate (1977) degrees in Economic History. In 1984, I passed a competitive examination for the title of professor at Unesp - Marília campus, where I retired as a full professor.

Question 2: In this sense, how did History meet International Relations and Diplomacy in your academic career?

CB: In order to graduate in Marília, the student was required to write and publicly defend a "thesis" before a three-member board, as provided for in the FAFI's internal legislation. In fact, it was a dissertation at the end of the course, just like the current TCC (Course Completion Work). The text, within the characteristics of a historical exposition in the format we had been taught, was the result of consulting sources, usually bibliographical, sought out by the students themselves, and was written in their own words. Copying the texts of the authors consulted, even in part, was not approved. There were tutors who checked the student's text against the sources cited. It was up to the student, usually at the end of the third year, to take the initiative

to find a supervisor, with whom the topic to be studied was defined, as well as its feasibility. The Belgian professor Eddy Stols, who at the time was in charge of the Chairs of Iberian History and History of America in Marília, accepted my request for guidance. As he was absent for part of the following year, I completed my dissertation under the guidance of Professor José Roberto do Amaral Lapa, who held the chair of Brazilian History. A few years later, Professor Lapa moved to Unicamp. Hoping to detect possible reactions in Brazil to the Mexican Revolution (1910-1917), I realized the weight of Mexican-North American relations in the revolutionary process. Reading the documents published by Isidro Fabela, Carranza's Secretary of Relations, led me to write my final dissertation focusing on these relations throughout the period in question. From then on, I focused my attention on inter-American relations. Along these lines, my master's dissertation was on Brazil and the Third International American Conference held in Rio de Janeiro in 1906. My contact with the Brazilian documents kept in the Itamaraty Historical Archive sparked my interest in the figure of Baron do Rio Branco and the First Republic of Brazil. My studies therefore followed a natural course.

Question 3: What is your assessment of International Relations courses in Brazil, after they emancipated themselves from Social Sciences and became autonomous areas of knowledge? How do you assess the formation of IR graduates today and their insertion in the job market?

CB: I haven't kept up with the news enough to have a firm opinion on how I.R. graduates fit into the job market, and I don't know if there are any polls on the subject. From what I can see, I can see that our postgraduates are increasingly being absorbed as teachers in public and private universities, which is very encouraging for us. I also notice that colleagues in our field are working in large international companies, particularly in advisory roles.

Question 4: As a student, researcher and professor, you have experienced the Brazilian university and postgraduate education from the 1960s to the present day from the inside. What do you see as the main changes and continuities?

CB: I'm not well versed in education legislation, but I've noticed that federal law 5.540 of 1968 was a decisive milestone in the structure and organization of universities. Until the 1960s, doctorates were taken without the obligation to attend courses. The researcher's relationship was exclusively with their advisor. This legislation established a date for those already enrolled

to complete and defend their doctorate directly. From then on, master's and doctoral degrees could only be awarded by postgraduate courses, with clearly defined deadlines and rules. Foreign language proficiency exams, attendance at courses and qualifying exams became compulsory.... In my opinion, this was a necessary update, so much so that it is still in force. Until then, a doctorate took a long time and was often a work of personal professional maturity. The doctoral thesis carried more weight in academia than it does now, because there were few doctors, except in well-structured universities, which are usually rigorous in awarding the title. The current system is not without its problems either, in my opinion. I don't see the need to take subjects that aren't related to the topic of the thesis. I also notice that there is an eagerness for numbers in order to meet targets and deadlines, which often results in dissertations and theses of dubious quality. Texts should offer something new, even if it's something modest, as long as it's based on reliable sources. The university's main mission is to create and disseminate knowledge. For this to happen, it must discover and support talent. According to my personal observations, the researcher today has much more favorable circumstances and conditions than in the 1950s and 60s: the initial hiring by the state's isolated public Colleges was part-time; today, the contractor already starts on the RDIDP (full-time teaching and research regime). Obtaining this regime took place at the end of a lengthy process, based above all on a research project (which was separate from the employment contract), and judged by the Permanent Working Regime Commission (CPRT) of the State Education Council. Full time was granted for three years, during which the researcher submitted two annual reports on the progress of the research. Only after the final report was submitted was the CPRT to decide whether or not to keep the professor on this scheme, even though a favorable decision did not release him from the annual reports. Nowadays, lecturer-researchers at public universities have much more favorable conditions from the time they graduate, such as grants, housing for those who need it and a public university restaurant. Young researchers have fewer obstacles when it comes to publishing their own work. CAPES and CNPq, although they had existed since 1951 at the beginning of Vargas' democratic government, acquired a new dynamic and were decisive in improving the quality of postgraduate courses by awarding scholarships directly linked to the programs, imposing deadlines, and creating a ranking of programs that weighs on the distribution of resources. In the state of São Paulo, FAPESP has been in place since 1962. Similar institutions have been created in other states, such as FAPERJ and FAPERGS. It should not be overlooked that there are large companies that finance the execution of projects.

Question 5: One of your books, "*História da Política Exterior do Brasil*" (History of Brazilian Foreign Policy), published in 1992 with Amado Luis Cervo, has become a classic in Brazilian academia, with many reissues and an extraordinary influence on students and teachers. To what do you attribute the success of this book?

CB: Our intention was to apply the theoretical tools that have their roots in the *Annales, E.S.C.* This approach had already been used by historians of the economy, society, mentalities, etc., but it had not reached international relations, which was then identified with diplomatic history, which was identified with political history. Our intention was to produce a manual using the new methodology, starting from the view that foreign policy is not isolated, but integrated into the whole of national reality, more precisely the external face of the state's general policy. This takes into account the forces that influence foreign policy, be they economic, political, traditional or, above all, the external context. It was based on this overall vision that we drew up the periodization of Brazilian foreign policy. Our text filled an empty space. It was hard work, especially considering that at the time we didn't have the resources provided today by information technology. Needless to say, the researcher had to move around and spend a lot of time consulting and making notes in archives and libraries. For me, all this effort was worth the thrill of reading and/or touching the original documents with due care.

Question 6: From the ABC policy (Argentina, Brazil and Chile) in the First Republic, the first decade of the 20th century, to Mercosur in the 1990s, there have been many, many policies around the union of South American countries. How do you see this issue now, in 2023? Has this configuration reached any significant concreteness? Has it reached its apogee and is tending towards decay, or does it still have prospects for the future?

CB: I'd like to start by noting that the ABC signed in 1915 had no practical effect. The treaty didn't even come into force because the Argentine Chamber of Deputies refused to approve it. It was fashionable to sign pacifist treaties because of the Great War that had begun the previous year, as I have already shown in "*Política externa da Primeira República*" (Foreign Policy in the First Republic). At the time, the United States alone signed more than a dozen treaties of this nature. In any case, the act itself symbolizes a great moment in Brazil-Argentina friendship. At the beginning of Latin America's independent period, Simon Bolivar had taken the initiative to convene a congress of American nations, which met in Panama in 1826. No practical results

were achieved. In 1889-90, the representatives of all the American republics, convened by the US government, held the Pan-American Conference in Washington (later also called the First American International Conference), with virtually no results in terms of integration. The second conference of the same nature took place in Mexico City in 1902; in 1906 it was Rio de Janeiro's turn to host the Third International American Conference, and the Fourth in 1910 was held in Buenos Aires. The next one, planned for Santiago de Chile in 1914, was suspended due to the world conflict.

The ABC project of the Baron of Rio Branco (Brazilian Chancellor from 1902 to 1912) had political objectives: to act together in order to avoid power shifts through military "pronouncements" that embarrassed Latin America. It had no aim of countering the United States. This was also the view of the influential Assis Brasil, who advocated including Uruguay in this grouping and stressed that the united forces of these countries would act in line with the forces of the United States. It was no more than a project, unfinished in fact, due to the difficulties that arose between the chancelleries of Brazil and Argentina at the time. In 1948, in Bogotá, the OAS was created as a regional body of the UN. In 1960, ALALC (Latin American Free Trade Association) was established in Montevideo. In 1991, Mercosur. Bill Clinton launched the failed FTAA project in 1994. My initial enthusiasm for Mercosur led me to imagine that it would be the crowning achievement of integration after so many failed attempts. The free movement of people, goods and services between the signatory countries clashed with established specific interests. The list of exceptions to the common import rule became asymmetrical. In reality, Mercosur was heading towards irrelevance, as Bernal-Meza rightly noted. One more frustration. Mercosur would gain new momentum with the PT's rise to power. This list of attempts is enough to fuel our skepticism. The economies of the countries in the area differ greatly from one another. If one member is interested in lowering or eliminating customs tariffs, others would find it unthinkable to give up this important source of revenue. Differences in exchange rate policies are another obstacle, making any attempt at a common currency unfeasible. The arguments put forward by Latin Americans to reject the proposal for a common currency put forward by the United States at the 1889-90 Conference are still valid today. Another difficulty is the loss of freedom to negotiate bilateral agreements. These are faster and cater specifically for the countries that sign them. Negotiating as a bloc implies giving up part of national sovereignty.

Question 7: Regarding Brazil specifically, there have been six different presidents since the end of the military regime. In relation to the diplomacy of these governments of Sarney, FHC, Lula, Dilma, Temer and Bolsonaro, do you identify lines of continuity? Or are the differences more important in this comparison?

CB: It's commonplace to say that the international context exerts a strong coercion on national systems, which often prevents attempts at sudden, far-reaching changes, i.e. real "turnarounds" in a country's foreign policy. After the initial impetus, in the medium to long term things tend to return to their natural course. This does not exclude changes in a country's foreign policy in order to bring it into line with the worldview of the newcomers to power. Obviously, the difficulties will be greater or smaller depending on the scope of these changes.

I would like you to forgive me for not commenting on the period that began in 1985. It would be foolhardy for me to do so, as I am not familiar with the documentation pertaining to the period, which has not yet come to an end, nor have I been able to keep up with the production of international relations scientists as a whole. What's more, if the historian doesn't intend to produce a dated text, they need to have a certain distance from what they intend to analyze.

Question 8: As we speak, a war has been going on in Europe for over a year between Ukraine and Russia, which seems to put Russia and China on one side and the US and Western Europe on the other. How do you see this issue at the present time? Is Brazilian neutrality possible or would it be more productive for our country to align itself unconditionally with one of the sides?

CB: Unrestricted neutrality.

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