

Czechoslovakia and Brazil 1945-1989

Diplomats, Businessmen, Spies and Guerrilheiros

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Abstract *This work summarises political, economic and security relations between Czechoslovakia and Brazil from 1945 to 1989. During this period Brazil adopted different approaches towards the Eastern bloc. In this context, despite some difficulties, Czechoslovakia not only maintained diplomatic relations with Brazil, but succeeded in enhancing them gradually. This work answers the following questions: why was the partnership stable despite acute ideological divergences? What major obstacles plagued their relations? Was Czechoslovakia active in the fight against the military regime due to its international commitments within the Eastern bloc? The results suggest that two major facts were decisive for the stable position of Czechoslovakia in Brazil: a strong tradition of bilateral relations and that both sides saw economic advantages in keeping the mutual trade flows. Czechoslovakia was involved in some propaganda and intelligence activities which were seen as hostile by the Brazilian government; though the former was thoughtful enough to avoid major incidents. This research is based on unpublished documents from Czech archives.*

Keywords: Brazil, Czechoslovakia, diplomatic relations, mutual trade, intelligence activities, Cold War

Introduction

This work presents a historical narrative for the unfolding of Czecho-

slovak-Brazil relations over the expansive period of the Cold War. While this work is not intended to engage in debates surrounding the wider Cold War context, it takes for granted that the Cold War had, essentially, constructed two blocs – a “Western” and an “Eastern” – and that these acted as sources of polarity with few alternative power sources for the better part of the 20th century. From this initial assumption, this work seeks to understand the perseverance of Czechoslovak-Brazil relations despite being located on different sides of the Cold War. Since their relations were turbulent in some decades and smooth in others, this work addresses the complexity of their economic and diplomatic relations through analyses conducted chronologically; from the formative until the concluding years of the Cold War.

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From Ally to Enemy? (1945-1948)

Brazil recognised Czechoslovakia on 28 December 1918 and their diplomatic missions opened in June 1920. Since then, Czechoslovakia has maintained its relations to Brazil uninterrupted—with the exception of three years during WWII, 15 March 1939 until September 1942. Prior to WWII, both countries retained stable political and trade relations and many Czechoslovak firms were successful in Brazil, such as Jawa, Baťa and Škoda Plzeň (in 1937 its bureau and its trading branch Omnipol Brasileira were opened in Rio de Janeiro). Czechoslovak arms and agriculture machinery products were also known in Brazil.

During WWII, Brazil eventually joined the Allies and restored diplomatic relations with the Czechoslovak government in exile in London in September 1942 and the bonds of their friendship were strengthened by the tragedies unfolding in Europe and Brazil's deep sense of sympathy. For instance, in 1944 the town of Santo Antônio do Capivari in the Rio de Janeiro state was renamed Lidice to commemorate the second anniversary of the Lidice massacre. Relations between Czechoslovakia and Brazil continued into the immediate post-WWII period and a new trade cooperation agreement was signed in 1946. However, the clouds of international partition were gathering and it did not take long time before problems linked to the rise of Iron Curtain appeared. The Czechoslovak rejection of Marshall Plan aid coupled with Brazil's rendering of the Brazilian Communist Party illegal and Brazil's severing of diplomatic relations to the USSR (1947) complicated relations. And, the Czechoslovak performance at the Paris Peace Conference (1946) caused certain disappointment in the Brazilian Ministry of For-

eign Affairs (Itamaraty - a nickname for Brazil's Ministry of Foreign Relations; named after the original seat of the Brazilian Foreign Service at Itamaraty Palace in Rio de Janeiro), although (then) Brazilian Minister of Foreign Affairs Raul Fernandes was declared his sympathies to Edvard Beneš whom he knew personally in Geneva during the League of Nations era.¹ According to Fernandes, the Czechoslovak delegation did not react to the Brazilian proposal of becoming a mediator together with Canada 'while Canada was honoured.'² At the same time, Czechoslovakia's voting with the USSR at the Conference reinforced the belief that the country had, effectively, become a satellite of Moscow. It was not only the Conference that strained relations with Brazil. As a reaction to the journey of Czechoslovak politicians to Moscow and the refusal of Marshall Plan aid (1947), the Czechoslovak legation alerted Prague that '(o)ur expansion in trade and cultural areas is being slowed down by the development of world politics that pushes us to the opposite coalition to which Brazil belongs.'³ Czechoslovak diplomats proposed a solution to overcome the country's political situation through the application of a sound trade policy, i. e. increasing Czechoslovak export of goods Brazil wanted. This became the defining formula for the relations between Czechoslovakia and Brazil over the following years.

Alienation and Rapprochement (1948-1955)

The situation facing Czechoslovakia's engagements in Brazil, between 1948-1951, was uncertain: several campaigns against socialist countries took place in the media and in the US Congress and there was evident US pressure to sever diplomatic relations to these countries (i.e. Czechoslovakia and Poland, other communist countries had only trade representations in Brazil at that time). Czechoslovak diplomats experienced serious obstacles in their daily work, such as difficulties in obtaining entry visas to Brazil and the repeated retention of the coveted diplomatic pouch. Czechoslovakia was seen by Brazil as 'an ally from the last war [that] has become a potential adversary in the next war.'⁴ At the same time, Czechoslovak diplomats noted that Brazil was interested in possible deliveries of complete industrial facilities – shoe and textile machinery, energy sector – and that Brazil was a strategic source of raw materials for Czechoslovak industry, notably iron ore and coffee.⁵ Czechoslovakia represented an important alternative market for Brazil in case of sales difficulties with its traditional partners as well as source

of important technologies for its industrialisation, evidenced by the cession of Brazil's rhetorical attacks against Czechoslovakia with the former's economic troubles and its need to sell coffee to new markets.

The death of the first Czechoslovak Communist President, Klement Gottwald (13 April 1953) had symbolic significance for Czechoslovak-Brazilian relations and the Brazilian government reacted protocolary in much the same way as with the case of death of British King George VI. The conclusion of Czechoslovak diplomacy was that Brazil wanted to continue in mutual relations despite activities of Brazilian communists in Czechoslovakia. In 1954 a new trade agreement was signed.

Czechoslovakia and Brazil 1945-1989

Czechoslovakia was gradually strengthening its cooperation with the Brazilian communist party since WWII and Czechoslovak diplomats held regular consultations with the iconic leader of Brazilian communists, Júlio Prestes. On 11 May 1948, three months after the coup in Prague, the presidium of the Czechoslovak communist party had, on its agenda, information about the situation of their Brazilian comrades submitted by novelist Jorge Amado. Between 1950-1952, Amado lived with his family in Dobříš, near Prague. According to the memoirs of Amado's wife, Zélia Gattai, the couple was confronted with the political show trials in Czechoslovakia in the 1950s; they touched home when Amado's close friends were affected. When Clementis and Geminder received capital punishment during the Slánský process, Amado was particularly alarmed. The Slánský affair so shocked Amado that he eventually left the Communist party.⁶ One bridge – between communist parties – in a world increasingly polarised was, therefore, damaged even before it could properly function. This, however, did not detract from the overall purpose of either Brazil or Czechoslovakia which both sought ways to maintain economic-fired relations in the cracks exposed in the bipolar standoff.

The Kubitschek Era (1955-1961)

With the election of Juscelino Kubitschek as Brazilian President (1955) Czechoslovak diplomats informed Prague that his appointment offered better perspectives for enhancing trade relations and political and cultural cooperation. Czechoslovakia wanted to participate in Kubitschek's development projects and, until the conclusion of his mandate, succeeded in bolstering trade cooperation: in 1955-1956 trade volume registered a record of about \$42 million (USD), numbers not

surpassed until the 1970s (see Annex). During this period, Czechoslovakia mainly imported iron ore, cocoa, coffee, leather, oil and seeds while exporting ready machines, malt, consumer articles, hops and chemicals. Czechoslovak supplies of industrial facilities were still modest.

In 1959, Kubitschek's wife Sarah and his daughters visited Czechoslovakia; an important goodwill mission that contributed to the 1960 signing of a new trade agreement and the reopening of the Czechoslovak consulate in São Paulo after a 21 year closure, while Brazil's diplomatic mission was elevated to an embassy in October 1960. Such confidence building measures were topped off by the visit of Brazilian Vice President Goulart to Czechoslovakia in December 1960.

The Czechoslovak Embassy often noted that Kubitschek publicly referred to his Czech origins – his maternal grandfather came from South Bohemia – and Czechoslovakia saw in Kubitschek a way to enhance their access to Brazilian decision-making. However, such access such not be confused with alignment and it is clear that Kubitschek's foreign policy was directed at the US; the chief political and economic ally of Brazil.⁷ More important for Czechoslovakia was Kubitschek's vice president, later president, João Goulart, who accepted the invitation of Czechoslovakia to visit the country in 1956. Throughout the Cold War period, Goulart was the Brazilian politician with the greatest interest in Czechoslovakia; in his functions of Vice President and President he – according to the archives – worked at enriching bilateral relations and actively consulted Czechoslovak diplomats.

In February 1959, the Czechoslovak MFA prepared a more complex policy approach towards Latin America and, accordingly, Brazil was the Latin American country with which Czechoslovakia had the most developed relations. The strategy notes that due to growing nationalism in Brazil, especially in the army, there were groups with a more cautious attitude towards the US and Czechoslovakia should, therefore, focus on military circles. The strategy also recommended targeting national bourgeoisie and working with their refusal of supranational monopolies.⁸ The more open stance of Brazil to the Eastern bloc was pragmatic and partly caused by Brazilian fears of the integration of Western Europe which was regarded as a dangers since it could decrease capital flows to Brazil by increasing investments to Africa which was competing with Brazil over many tropical products.

At the same time, Czechoslovakia carefully analysed the Brazilian

position on the Cuban revolution. Kubitschek met with Cuba's new establishment. It was a "U-turn" in Brazil's policy towards Cuba. Czechoslovak diplomats assessed that this step was caused by the strong public movement in favour of Cuban revolution in Brazil.

On the intelligence front, the Czechoslovak secret services revealed some information about active collaborators of the CIA among Brazilian diplomats. Czechoslovak agent codenamed "WILLI" worked in Itamaraty's cypher department. According to WILLI's reports Brazilian Ambassador to Cuba and later Minister of Foreign Affairs, Vasco Leitão da Cunha, worked for the CIA. He was given tasks by the US Embassy in Rio de Janeiro through the Political Department of Itamaraty. This information was promptly submitted to the Cuban leadership. The Czechoslovak resident in Havana met Fidel Castro on 09 November 1960 at midnight. The Attaché of the Cuban Embassy in Prague also maintained contact with Cunha and was uncovered by WILLI and warned by Cunha himself not to return to Cuba.⁹

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The findings of Czechoslovak intelligence on Goulart's visit to Prague at the beginning of December 1960 that the Vice-President 'liked a lot our plum brandy that he had been ordering quite often into his hotel room' might have not been so pertinent.¹⁰ Far more interesting were records of the presidium of the Czechoslovak communist party where it was noted that on a special request of Goulart an extra meeting between the Brazilian Vice-President and Prime Minister Široký was held without the presence of the representatives of Brazilian Embassy and Itamaraty. Goulart did not want to discuss some issues in front of members of Itamaraty, i.e., as a report quotes him as called it a 'reactionary institution.' In a private conversation with Široký, Goulart stressed that Brazil needed the support of socialist countries and that Czechoslovakia could act as a bridge between Brazil and Moscow.¹¹

Independence in Foreign Policy: Close Partners? (1961-1964)

Independent Foreign Policy (PEI) brought radical change to Brazil's foreign policy and impacted on Brazil's relations to socialist countries. Besides some ideological swaying were pragmatic motives, mainly the expansion of Brazil to new markets.¹² The Brazilian government proclaimed that it wanted to make up to 40% of its foreign trade volume with the Eastern bloc. President Quadros established relations with Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria, re-established diplomatic relations

with the USSR (November 1961), established relations with China, supported Cuba and organised the so-called Dantas trade mission to Eastern Europe.

There was a certain intensity driving Czechoslovak and Brazilian relations during this period. In February 1961, a mission led by Deputy Foreign Minister, Jiří Hájek, visited Brazil (it was his third trip to Brazil in the period 1959-1961), in May 1961 the Dantas trade mission visited Prague and signed protocols on economic, scientific and technological cooperation. In March 1962, Minister of Education, Kahuda, visited Brazil and signed an Agreement on Cultural cooperation (never entered into force because of the 1964 coup) and in August 1963 a Czechoslovak consulate opened in Recife. In January 1964, the first meeting of the joint committee – as stipulated by the 1960 agreement – took place and an agreement on scientific cooperation was signed (though also never entered into force).

On 14 March 1961, a special envoy of Quadros's Ambassador João Dantas visited Czechoslovak Ambassador Kuchválek and officially announced the intention of Brazil to acquire, from Czechoslovakia, supplies of complete industrial facilities in an amount of 100 million (USD) per year with a 12-year credit that would go beyond the valid trade agreement. Dantas mission went to Eastern Europe at the end of April 1961 and came back at the beginning of June. It visited Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Romania, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Poland and Albania.

The Czechoslovak Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade, David and Krajčír, submitted to the presidium of the communist party (27 April 1961) the position of Dantas' mission with a rather cautious stance. There were speculations that this initiative could be a manoeuvre how to 'frighten the US and persuade them to provide a loan to Brazil.' There was also the fear that the high demands of Brazilians on credit and the consequent debt of socialist countries would serve as proof that these countries were not able to fulfil their commitments.

Between 15 and 19 May 1961 Dantas' mission visited Prague and two protocols were signed: on technological and scientific cooperation (the financing of joint activities and the intention to provide credits to technological cooperation) and a protocol on economic cooperation. In this document both sides committed to a total trade volume for the 1961-1965 period that would reach \$500 million (USD)—it only reached some \$144 million (USD) in those years. Emphasis was paid to the Czechoslovak supply of complete industrial facilities. For this

purpose a joint committee of both governments was proposed to convene, though did not manage to until February 1964, a point that may help to explain the trade shortfall. The protocol noted that Czechoslovakia would supply Brazil with complete industrial facilities to the amount of \$60 million (USD) until the end of 1966. This was later reevaluated to \$25-30 million (USD) and also explains the trade shortfall since industrial facilities made up about 40% of the total volume of Czechoslovakia's exports to Brazil. Among the principal products were equipment for steam and hydroelectric power plants, textiles, shoe and leather manufacturing machinery and cereal mills.

According to an official Itamaraty document released after the mission, the total amount of contracts during Dantas' mission was estimated to reach some \$5 billion USD; an impossible figure. The document stressed that this was a way for Brazil to guarantee the sales of its traditional commodities (coffee, cotton, and cacao) in exchange for the supply of coal, fuel, chemicals, agriculture machinery, zinc and lead.¹³

Despite such efforts, the trade volume between Czechoslovakia and Brazil actually decreased owing to the ideological conflict that infused foreign policy orientations among the Brazilian decision-making elite. Notably, tensions-cum-paralysis emerged between the preferences of Brazil's presidents such as Quadros and Goulart and those of the Itamaraty and security forces which were very reluctant to move closer to the socialist camp. From the assessment of Czechoslovakia's intelligence community the anticommunist mood was growing in Brazil's military intelligence and in the context of *PEI* it is interesting that Itamaraty was not willing to hire so-called 'progressive cadres,' those that were deemed to be left-oriented.¹⁴

Yet, at the time, Dantas himself 'believed in his protocols' and expended much energy attempting to implement them. This did not stop them from unravelling however and Dantas was left in political limbo by domestic (f)actors in Brazil. In 1963 Dantas clearly assigned blame to Brazil's military circles for obstructing his efforts.¹⁵ At the end of the *PEI* era, when Prestes met Czechoslovak President Novotný, the latter complained that Dantas' mission had literally brought nothing. According to Prestes' the mission had a demagogic character and ministries were sabotaging Goulart's orders.¹⁶

In 1962, the Permanent Inter-Ministerial Committee for Cooperation with Socialist Countries (COLESTE) was created and this organ became the legacy of the *PEI* and later played an important part when

Brazil's relations to socialist – and post-socialist – states began to intensify in the late 1960s and early 1970s.¹⁷ According to Dantas' address to Brazil's Congress, ideology did not drive the country closer to the socialist bloc; it was the national project of development and the fight to end poverty.¹⁸ However, the new strategy of Czechoslovakia to Latin America was ideologically fired and Prague maintained that the renewal of relations between Brazil and the USSR was a victory for the 'Brazilian anti-national bourgeoisie that was close to *latifundistas* and strong groups of national bourgeoisie.'¹⁹ Some research material claims that the 'working-class and agriculture' was being established in Brazil.

There were indications that such a victory would be swift; in October 1963 consultations between Czechoslovakia and the USSR were held on orientating the socialist states in Latin America. The USSR projected high hopes on Brazil, as a country that had the potential to strengthen Soviet influence in the region and even tilt the balance of influence away from Washington and to Moscow. Czechoslovakia was the facilitator and according to records of Soviet diplomats, Czechoslovakia was the point guard for them in Brazil because it was deemed as more experienced in Brazilian affairs than the USSR.

The *PEI* had, from its inception, major political and institutional limitations and, owing to the regime change in Brazil, it turned out to be an episode that had a very limited impact on Prague-Brasília relations; a point reflected in the turbulence of the subsequent decade.

An Uncertain Decade, 1964-1974

The regime change in Brazil was a quick affair and produced immediate repercussions for Brazil and its international relations. On 31 March 1964 Brazil's military government expelled a Czechoslovak press agency correspondent, declared *persona non-grata* Czechoslovak diplomat Kvita – a.k.a (intelligence officer) Peterka – and bullets were fired against the Czechoslovak consulate in São Paulo. To put it lightly, Brazil adopted a more suspicious position towards Czechoslovakia. All official cultural and scientific cooperation was put on hold until the mid-1980s.

In foreign policy, Brazil's new administration developed the concept of the 'Correction of the Path' and the previous 'neutrality tendencies' in the formative years of the Cold War were abandoned. At the same time, the economy opened more to foreign capital and demonstrably followed the US foreign policy line. On 13 May 1964, as a result of the

Cuban Missile Crisis, Brazil broke diplomatic relations with Cuba and clearly demonstrated where it was situated in the ideological struggle; the Western bloc. Interestingly, from 1964 until 1986 the Embassy of Czechoslovakia represented Cuban interests in Brazil.

Despite such turbulence, the Czechoslovak government did not hesitate to recognise Brazil new regime and the Embassy in Rio received instructions to formally acknowledge the new president, i.e. to confirm respective verbal note of the Itamaraty that informed about the change and 'given the constitutionality of the change of regime do not undertake any protests at international or non-governmental organisations.'²⁰

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In May 1964, the Director of the Latin American Department of the Czechoslovak MFA travelled to Brazil for dialogue, which produced a positive outcome for both parties. According to Ježek, the Itamaraty appreciated the patience of Czechoslovakia in solving the provocations of Brazil's security forces' behaviour against Czechoslovak missions and to press propaganda campaigns. Minister Leitão da Cunha supported the conclusions of the joint committee from January 1964 and assured that there would be no more obstacles from the Brazilian side; again the pragmatic approach prevailed and the economic interests of both parties was certainly more important than political posturing. The reported conversation between the Czechoslovak Consul, Hádek, with General Lira Tavares, Commander of Brazil's 4th Army illustrates well the attitude of the Brazilian Army and political elites to Czechoslovakia. Apparently, Tavares showed Hádek his cigarette case which was embossed with a picture of the Prague Castle. Hádek asked whether Tavares was not afraid to 'have in his pocket an object with the image of the seat of the Presidential Office of a "Red" government?' Tavares tersely replied that '(w)e have nothing against Czechoslovakia; just do not import here your ideology.'²¹

Efforts to focus primarily on trade – importing goods, not ideology – became the standard governing Czechoslovak-Brazilian relations, but, as demonstrated below, Czechoslovakia could not escape its international commitments in the Cold War. By 1965, the second meeting of the Czechoslovak-Brazilian joint committee on economic cooperation occurred and the Brazilian government confirmed its interest to carry on with a "business as usual" approach to trade relations and in 1966 Czechoslovakia delivered complete industrial facilities – such as a hydroelectric power plant in Bariri (São Paulo state, 3 turbines by 48,7

MW), in construction were hydroelectric power plants in Cachoeira Dourada (the State of Goiás, 2 x 55 MW) and Ibitinga (São Paulo state, 3 x 45 MW) and a thermoelectric power plant in Porto Alegre (3 x 8 MW). There was also a cement plant in Pará with a capacity of 500 t/

24 h and a contract was signed to double its capacity. Some logging industry facilities were delivered to the Amazonas states and shoe factories to the state of Bahia.

The situation was a bit schizophrenic for the Czechoslovak government. On one hand there was a great interest to sell to Brazil Czechoslovak traditional machinery products, including complete industrial facilities that required a certain level of cooperation with Brazilian federal and state governments. Brazil was a strategic source of iron ore for Czechoslovak industry. For this a certain degree of diplomatic relations had to be maintained. On the other hand, the military authoritative government was a defined adversary of Czechoslovakia's communist regime. Consider the main tasks of the Czechoslovak intelligence services for Brazil, which set the following goals (as of May 1966):

1. To monitor the activities of the opposition and **provide active assistance to "progressive groups" in order to defeat the government and avoid the victory of "ultra reaction,"**
2. To monitor the probability of a further "far-right wing coup," and
3. To provoke moods against the US and support "neutralist tendencies," with a focus on the "national bourgeoisie."

These goals must be measured according to the main foreign policy priorities of Czechoslovakia which were to:

1. help improve relations with Cuba and "neutralise" hostile actions against Cuba,
2. exploit conflicts between the Brazilian government and the US, and
3. monitor efforts of the US to impose, through Brazil, its interests in the UN and the OAS.²²

Opposition groups surrounding former president Goulart that fled to Uruguay were one of the main targets of the work of Czechoslovak intelligence in Uruguay.²³ Czechoslovak intelligence did not assume that, given the circumstances, bilateral relations between Czechoslovakia and Brazil could improve, but believed that mutual trade would grow. One goal of the secret services was to try to avoid leakage of intelligence activities that could harm their mutual relationship and eventually lead to the breaking-off of relations.²⁴

Brazil's counter-espionage unit (CSN) considered Czechoslovak intelligence service as seconded only to Soviet. Accordingly, Brazil regarded the Czechoslovak Embassy as a well-organised centre of espionage that was working in favour of communist subversion and had reliable collaborators among journalists, students in the Congress and in the unions.²⁵ When investigating the activities of one of the first groups of the *guerrilhas* that fought against the Brazilian government in Caparaó in the second half of 1967, Brazilian authorities discovered that the Czechoslovak government was directly involved. And, Czechoslovakia accepted Brazilian emigrants that arrived to Prague through Cuba where they underwent intensive training. Czechoslovak security forces provided them with false documents and financial support to get back to Brazil where they began to provide Czechoslovakia, and hence the wider Eastern bloc, with intelligence. This was part of a joint operation of Czechoslovakia and Cuba called *Manuel*.²⁶

On 27 September 1967 Itamaraty summoned the Czechoslovak Ambassador and gave him a secret verbal note that complained about these activities stressing that 'you can deny all this, but we have the proof.' Czechoslovakia instructed its Ambassador, Kocman, not to handle the requested written reply to the Brazilian government, but to orally inform them that the Czechoslovak government could not verify the identities and intentions of everybody going to and coming from Czechoslovakia. In a report prepared for Novotný this event was described as a provocation prepared by Brazil. However, the archives from the Intelligence Directorate, confirms that support to Caparaó *guerrilha* was part of operation *Manuel*. Czechoslovak intelligence officer Svatoň added that he had no doubts that Brazilians had in their hands absolutely convincing proof.²⁷ Brazilian communist warned the Embassy that some Czechoslovak diplomats might be extradited, though this did not occur however, as a precaution, Prague ordered its diplomats to restrict journeys to the interior of Brazil for some time.

Detailed information about operation *Manuel* likely reached Brazil through the renowned Brazilian agent in Prague, Mauro Santanaya, who was working at the Portuguese Language Department of Radio Prague Foreign Broadcasting. In July 1967, Russians alerted Czechoslovak intelligence that Santayana had informed the Brazilian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Pinto, about the training of *guerrilheiros* in Prague. Pinto is said to have been upset by the news that *guerrilhas* active in Latin America were supported both by China and Moscow, whereas the

assumption had been that only China was active.²⁸ This involvement complicated the Czechoslovak position in Brazil and put their relations at risk. Apparently, supporting 'national salvation struggle' was higher on the Czechoslovak priority list than trade. Tomek quotes the report of the head of the Intelligence Directorate, Josef Houska (17 November 1967):

Our participation in Operation MANUEL is a part of the support to national salvation movements and it is done according to the conclusions of the 13th Czechoslovak communist party convention. We also have to take into account that our eventual refusal to help to our Cuban friends would have a negative effect on them and would not solve the problem. Our relatively qualified help would be replaced by less qualified measures applied by our Cuban friends and besides this we would lose any control over this operation.²⁹

Change in the Air? The 1968 Prague Spring

Given the tense state of bilateral affairs, it seemed that only a tectonic shift could get Brazil and Czechoslovakia back to the negotiating table. Prague Spring was the trigger and the series of demonstrations that gathered in frequency, stamina and demands profoundly impacted Czechoslovakia's foreign affairs and provoked a form of *détente* with Brazil. Despite the Warsaw Pact ordered information ban, the Czechoslovak Ambassador to Brazil, Kocman, organised a press conference to report on political developments in Czechoslovakia. The MFA did not approve because 'changes leading to democratisation in Czechoslovakia would not bring any modifications to foreign policy.'³⁰ In other words, the veil of where Czechoslovak foreign policy was actually made was removed.

Kocman repeatedly informed Prague that Brazil was monitoring the Prague Spring very closely particularly the nature of changes facing Czechoslovakia and the possibility of coexistence of political and economic reforms with the existing communist system. Some questions emerged, such as: to what extent can a country belonging to the Eastern bloc have different internal policies. Kocman's response fully reflected the spirit of the Prague Spring and he is reported to have said that the 'dynamics of internal politics gives us a great possibility to execute Czechoslovak foreign policy and strengthen the authority of [Czechoslovak] Embassy [in Brazil].' Kocman asked Prague to send him

information about reforms and excerpts of speeches that he could use in contacts with his Brazilian partners.

The adequate dissemination of information about potential reforms in Czechoslovakia did not transpire. The Warsaw Pact and Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia (August 1968) was condemned at the UN Security Council, then being presided over by a Brazilian diplomat, Araújo Castro.³¹ The Czechoslovak Embassy reported to Prague that propagandic attacks against Czechoslovakia had become less frequent after January 1968 in an evident effort to support 'so called democratisation.' According to the Embassy, it was 'only [the] wrong interpretation of the intentions of the Czechoslovak communist party.'³² Unsurprisingly, after August 1968 Brazil was more reserved to its Central European partner. The media referred more often to subversive activities of Czechoslovakia against the Brazilian government on the Prague-Havana-Brazil axis.

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Things became more and more complicated and the Itamaraty deployed salami tactics to restrict Czechoslovak activities in 1969 and 1970. For instance, the Brazilian consent to open a branch of the Czechoslovak Commercial Bank (ČSOB) in Rio de Janeiro was revoked, permission was not provided to open up a representative office of Czechoslovak Airlines in Sao Paulo, participation on trade fairs and cultural activities was denied and the Itamaraty refused to celebrate, or even mark, the 50th Anniversary of the opening of diplomatic representations between Brazil and Czechoslovakia.

Despite such a negative political atmosphere, an important agreement in the area of cultural cooperation managed to be squeezed through. On 16 July 1960, an agreement between Prague Quadrennial and Biennale of São Paulo was concluded.³³ In São Paulo the biennial works of Czech artists such as Jiří Trnka, František Troester (1959) and Josef Svoboda was honoured repeatedly (1961, 1963, 1965). It was precisely this success of Czechoslovak scenography in São Paulo which inspired the foundation of the Prague Quadrennial in 1967 where Brazilians participated regularly. But it did not help the Czechoslovak position in Brazil, a position that was further eroded when a member of Brazil's communist opposition, José Duarte, who was arrested in August 1969, confessed that he got received a forged Brazilian passport from a Czechoslovak citizen through Cuban diplomats and Czechoslovak intermediaries in Prague. At the end of October 1969, the Czechoslovak Counterintelligence Directorate (II) reported a conversation

with Mauro Santanaya where he claimed that Brazil knew that, at that time, there were about twenty Brazilians in Prague trained in Cuba that were to be sent to Brazil via Madrid. Santanaya added that he was not personally against what was going on, but he said that it should be done in a smarter way so that whole operation could not be so easily spotted. In his opinion, the Czechoslovak government should consider that there were groups in the Brazilian Army that were trying to carry out a process of democratisation and that activities of terrorist groups like that could hamper their efforts.³⁴

On Saturday 12 September 1970, at 2135h a bomb exploded next to the main entrance of the Czechoslovak Embassy in Rio (a bomb was previously found at the Czechoslovak Embassy in autumn 1969). Radical right-wing movements were suspected of having carried out the attack. But this bomb attack was the last, significant incident that affected the relations between Brazil and Czechoslovakia. In April 1971 the Czechoslovak Embassy moved to Brasília and in September 1971 the residence of Czechoslovak intelligence was closed in Brazil.

In the years 1972-1973 Brazil was gradually opening to the socialist bloc. Based on the exchange of visits on the ministerial level – the Brazilian Minister of Energy Leite and Czechoslovakia's Foreign Trade Minister Barčák – negotiations on a barter (parallel) operation of Brazilian iron ore for Czechoslovak supplies of power plants were initiated. According to the Czechoslovak Ambassador to Brazil, the visit of Leite was approved directly by the Brazilian President and Brazil had a key interest in completing this deal. Then, in October 1973, the Joint Committee on Trade and Economic Cooperation met after six years and, in the middle of 1973, Czechoslovak affiliation *Škoda do Brasil* was opened to work exclusively on the construction of power plants. The appointment of a prominent Brazilian diplomat, José Sete Camara, to Ambassador in Prague (October 1972) was also seen as a positive sign. Camara was considered one of 'the most able members of Brazilian diplomatic corps' and he promoted economic cooperation and tried to avoid any political exchange of views. He is said to have contributed to the improvement of the overall visa situation of Czechoslovakia with Brazil.

1974–1989: Without Ideology?

The Doctrine of Responsible Pragmatism of Geisel's Administration confirmed the previous trend of trade links opening with the Eastern

bloc. There was a radical change of attitudes of the Itamaraty towards socialist countries. For example, in reaction to political actions of Brazilian politician José Bonifácio against communist countries, the Itamaraty reacted in an article in the daily newspaper Estado de São Paulo criticising these activities and suggesting that such attacks were pointless and harmful for Brazilian contacts with the Socialist bloc. The main argument was that Brazil was maintaining neither political nor cultural relations with the Eastern bloc, but was building trade relations instead. The article went on to note that those markets were crucial for Brazil and stressed that trade could not be subordinated to ideology and that such campaigns against socialist countries would harm diplomacy and serve only as 'useless hunts for witches.'³⁵

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At that time, Czechoslovakia was in the midst of constructing the third hydroelectric power plant in São Paulo state (Promissão), had delivered weaving mills to Pernambuco, logging industry machines to Amazonas and 30 wheat mills to Minas Gerais. Brazilian importation to Czechoslovakia was growing rapidly, thanks to the purchase of coffee and feed material besides iron ore supplies. Czechoslovak Minister of Foreign Trade, Barčák, commented on the situation by stressing that

Thanks to the positive and calm attitude of Brazilian authorities, despite some ideological and political divergences, the needed prerequisites for development of mutual trade relations were met and trends of discrimination from the past were overcome.³⁶

This statement is illustrated by the statistics and this chart shows the steep rise in the volume of trade between 1974-1988.

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Graphics disabled

The situation report on Czechoslovak activities in Latin America submitted in September 1981 to the Czechoslovak Minister of Foreign Affairs notes that Brazil has ceased to be a mere instrument of US foreign policy, both regionally and globally, and was by far the most important trading partner of Czechoslovakia in the region. But when setting the priorities for Czechoslovakia, Brazil appeared in the 5th rank together with Mexico, Argentina and Venezuela. Cuba, Nicaragua,

Grenada and general support to national salvation movements and revolutionary forces were top priorities.³⁷

Politically, the Czechoslovak MFA seemed to have given up a little in building a comprehensive political relationship with Brazil; it ceded more space to the Ministry of Foreign Trade. This is illustrated by worker flows and in 1983 out of some 33 Czechoslovaks dispatched to Brazil by the state only 6 worked for the MFA and the rest was in trade area with 11 from the Ministry of Foreign Trade, 10 from state enterprises for foreign trade and 6 from affiliations (Omnipol Brasileira and Skoda Brasileira).

In 1983, the Czechoslovak Foreign Intelligence Service proposed to renew its residence in Brazil.³⁸ The starting point was different from Czechoslovak intelligence activities in the 1960s and 1970s since Brazil was not primarily an enemy, but could become a base for the work of Czechoslovak secret service against the US. The study entitled: *Brazil as an Operational Area for Czechoslovak Intelligence* stressed that Brazil was gaining economic, political and security importance with an impact on a strategic area of the South Atlantic. Consider that

Czechoslovakia wanted to profit from the fact that the US positions in Brazil were weakening and that, according to this analysis, Brazil did not want to act as the US *gendarme* in Latin America and did not want to automatically confront the Eastern bloc.

The report added that Brazil was offering favourable conditions for Czechoslovakia's economic expansion because 'the time when big multinationals had priority in the South American markets is gone.'³⁹

In June 1984, the premier visit of a Czechoslovak Minister of Foreign Affairs to Brazil occurred. And, in 1985, with the end of the military regime in Brazil, relations became even more intense, although still largely focused on trade. Between 1985 and 1986 four Czechoslovak Ministers visited Brazil (the Ministers of Foreign Trade, Energy, Industry and Finance). The main goal was to boost trade cooperation with an eye on metallurgy projects. Then, in July 1985, an agreement on scientific cooperation was signed and negotiations on cultural agreement were initiated. In May 1987, the Prime Minister of Czechoslovakia, Lubomír Štrougal, visited Brazil and a new economic cooperation agreement was signed and set the main directions of economic cooperation until 2000. Both sides committed to increase trade volumes to \$1 billion (USD) by 2000.

After the changes in 1985, the Brazilian communist party was not legal, but communist leader – including Prestes – returned from exile; those that had not returned following the 1979 amnesty. The Czechoslovak communist party noted divisions in the Brazilian communist movement and their weak influence as a ‘lack of experience and revolutionary courage’ of the new leadership of Giocondo Dias.⁴⁰ A few months after the visit of the Brazilian Minister of Foreign Affairs to Prague (April 1989), where he signed a cultural agreement, democratisation caught up with the Czechoslovak communist government and, in December 1989, the Czechoslovak resident in Brasília had to look for the right answer to the question of one of his contacts as to who Václav Havel was.

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CONCLUSION

The relationship between Brazil and Czechoslovakia were rendered intensely complicated since they belonged to different, and competing, ideological camps during the Cold War. Throughout the entire period (1945-1989), Brazil occupied a key place in the strategic orientation of the Czechoslovak MFA, Ministry of Foreign Trade, the Czechoslovak Communist party and the intelligence services towards Latin America. While each of these institutions maintained a slightly different objective, trade was the centrepiece of Czechoslovak-Brazilian relations. Czechoslovakia sold its machinery products and Brazil was an important source of strategic raw materials, such as iron ore, coffee and other agricultural commodities.

There was a certain discrepancy in Czechoslovakia's foreign policy as it sought to maintain strong bilateral relations and tried to strengthen its political representation since stable diplomatic relations were *conditio sine qua non* for trade. However, Czechoslovakia was forced to fulfil the goals of Soviet foreign policy in Brazil and this created very complicated situations. Brazil did not share same interests, in fact not even in the period of *Independent Foreign Policy*, where the discourse was more open towards Eastern bloc, but in reality caution reined.

The close relationship between the Czechoslovak communist party and Brazilian communists and the former's role as the latter's link to Moscow, activities of international organisations acting from Prague, intelligence activities and even direct actions against the Brazilian government that supported opposition politically and in practical terms during the military regime in Brazil made a rather explosive cocktail.

It is surprising that it did not detonate and there were not more severe diplomatic clashes such as the extradition of diplomats or the severing of diplomatic relations. Czechoslovakia showed some skill when manoeuvring between support for trade and to opposition groups, but ultimately the patience of Brazil determined the depth of relations, probably due to the pre-war tradition of diplomatic and economic ties. For Brazilians, Czechoslovakia represented an alternative market for their traditional export commodities and offered interesting technologies needed for the development of Brazilian industry such as equipment for textile and shoes factories, cement and power plants. That the bilateral framework for economic cooperation was kept updated – 1946, 1950, 1954, 1960, 1977 and 1987 – speaks volumes since in other areas the result was very modest. In short, despite the trials and tribulations that sometimes frayed their bilateral relations, Czechoslovakia and Brazil learned from each other and managed to weather the storms to the extent that both states can now enjoy a relationship free of Cold War manipulations and pursue their interests together as part of the community of democracies.

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Annex: Trade volume Brazil-Czechoslovakia 1950-1988 (in millions of USD)

Notes

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