

“To stop voting is to vote for the enemy”: Catholic Church and press in building voters in Rio Grande do Sul (1945-1950)

“Ne pas voter, c'est voter dans l'ennemi”: L'Église et presse catholique dans la construction des électeurs au Rio Grande do Sul (1945-1950)

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Abstract: In order to understand the mobilization aimed at building voters in the initial period of the democratic experience, that is, building an interest in the act of voting at the time of the return of elections, the creation of national political parties and the significant expansion of the registered voter, this article analyzes the role of specific agents in this mobilization work: the Catholic Church, the Catholic Electoral League and the Catholic press. The study has Rio Grande do Sul as its spatial cutout and the newspapers *Correio Rio-Grandense* and *Jornal do Dia*, as well as *Unitas - bulletin of the ecclesiastical province of Rio Grande do Sul*. For such agents, in this moment of expanding electoral participation, how should the Catholic voter behave? What meanings were attributed to the act of voting? The construction of the Catholic voter is driven by a markedly anti-communist speech, articulated to the Church's positioning strategies before the State and to the practices of mobilization of the clergy and the Catholic Electoral League with a view to enlistment and voting.

Key words: Voter construction; Catholic press; Catholic Electoral League.

Résumé: L'objectif de cette étude est de comprendre la mobilisation visant à la construction de l'électeur dans la période initiale de l'expérience démocratique, c'est-à-dire à la construction d'un intérêt à voter lors du retour des élections, à la création de partis politiques nationaux et au accroissement expressive de l'électorat inscrit, le présent article analyse la performance d'agents spécifiques dans ce travail de mobilisation: l'Église Catholique, la Ligue Électorale Catholique et la presse catholique. L'étude a pour espace le Rio Grande do Sul et comme sources les journaux *Correio Rio-Grandense* et *Jornal do Dia*, ainsi que le *Unitas – Boletim da Província Eclesiástica de Porto Alegre*. Pour ces agents, au moment de l'accroissement de la participation électorale comment l'électorat catholique devrait se comporter? Quelles significations ont été attribuées au vote? La construction de l'électeur catholique est guidée par un discours nettement anticommuniste, articulé autour des stratégies de la

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position de l'Eglise devant l'État et des pratiques de mobilisation du clergé et de la Ligue Électorale Catholique pour l'enrôlement et le vote.

Mots-clés: Construction d'électeurs; Presse catholique; Ligue Électorale Catholique.

Initial considerations

The period of republican history that begins in 1945 has been considered the first in which a democratic regime in Brazil took effect - although with limitations. The main factors that characterize it can be summarized as follows: for the first time, there are national political parties disputing periodic elections in a competitive system and with a significant expansion of the electorate compared to previous periods (LAVAREDA, 1991; GOMES and FERREIRA, 2017). This expansion leads to the need to build an interest in representation and voting because, as stated by Michel Offerlé (2011), in order to have elections, there must be voters, or, to put it another way, it is necessary to constitute agents interested in voting and in electoral competition. From this need derives all the work of electoral mobilization, which is understood both as the result of a set of incitements aiming at the interest in voting and the means by which this result is achieved: taking the voter to the ballots (OFFERLÉ, 2011).

The agents of this electoral mobilization are parties and candidates, but also the press with its editors, journalists, commentators. In addition, there is an interest in the construction of voters on the part of the Catholic Church, acting through sermons at masses, the Catholic Electoral League and the press linked to Catholic groups. This last aspect is the focus of this article. How should the Catholic voter behave? What meanings were attributed to the act of voting? The article aims to understand this question by the Church and Catholic periodicals in Rio Grande do Sul during the initial period of the democratic experience - between 1945 and 1950. The main sources are two newspapers that can be framed in the concept of *Catholic press*. According to Oscar de Figueiredo Lustosa (1983), this qualification does not end with the fact that certain newspapers are produced by Catholics, nor does it deal with Catholic themes. The *Catholic press* would be characterized by a "specific manner and attitude in the conception of periodism, derived from its organic link with the mission of the Church" (LUSTOSA, 1983, p. 29). As we will see later, the newspapers *Correio Rio-Grandense* and *Jornal do Dia*, due to the content of their pages, combined these characteristics.

The *Correio Rio-Grandense* was edited by Capuchin friars in Garibaldi, in the Italian immigration region in Rio Grande do Sul. It circulated in Italian until 1941, when the New State nationalization campaign led it to be published in the national language. Its articles

were generally devoted to religious life and to farmers, the "settlers"¹. According to Carla Rodeghero (2003), the *Correio Rio-Grandense* circulated throughout the so-called colonial region of Rio Grande do Sul and also in regions of Santa Catarina and Paraná, reaching 35 thousand subscribers in 1950. This periodical, according to the author, embodied the role attributed to the Catholic press in the encyclical *Divini redemptoris*, published in 1937: "Fight against the tendencies of materialization and de-Christianization of life and fight against communism" (RODEGHERO, 2003, p. 181).

In 1947, the Catholic press of Rio Grande do Sul would have a daily in Porto Alegre: *Jornal do Dia*. It was founded by members of the Catholic Association for Cultural Diffusion, formed by the lay Catholic teaching profession, under the direction of Professor Armando Câmara and with the support of Metropolitan Archbishop D. Vicente Scherer². *Jornal do Dia* started to circulate in the capital and also in the interior, publishing international, national and state news and a section dedicated to religious subjects³. Its first editorial, on January 26, 1947, presented the journal's "mission": putting resources from the realm of technique to the service of the realm of the spirit, so that it communicates and radiates "an idea, an image, a point of view - the idea that ends in full and integral Christianity"⁴.

The purpose of this article, however, is not to reflect on the Catholic press in general, but on the role it plays, in a given context, in building an interest in voting and political representation - clearly articulated to a political project specific and concerning the relations between Church and State in Brazil at that time. For this reason, a source directly linked to the Archdiocese of Porto Alegre will also be used: *Unitas - Bulletin of the Ecclesiastical Province of Porto Alegre*. Created in 1913, it was edited quarterly by the Archdiocese of Porto Alegre and sent to parishes, dioceses and religious congregations. Through its pages, it is possible to have access to Vatican resolutions, speeches by the metropolitan archbishop, decrees for the creation of parishes, circulars, instructions, news, reports and documents from the Gaucho

¹ The digitized collection of the *Correio Rio-Grandense* newspaper is available on the Memory Center page of the Caxias do Sul City Council: <http://liquid.camaracaxias.rs.gov.br/portalliquid/Pasta/SubPastas/87>.

² Alfredo Vicente Scherer (1903-1996) studied at the Jesuit Seminary in São Leopoldo and received his doctorate in Theology at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome. It was ordained in 1926. He was secretary of the Archbishop of Porto Alegre, D. João Becker, to whom he succeeded from 1947 by appointment of Pius XII. He was Metropolitan Archbishop of Porto Alegre until 1981 (CPDOC, entry available at: <http://www.fgv.br/cpdoc/acervo/dicionarios/verbete-biografico/alfredo-vicente-scherer>).

³ The editions of *Jornal do Dia* are available at the Digital Library of the National Library: <http://memoria.bn.br/DocReader/docreader.aspx?bib=098230&pesq=>.

⁴ DEFINING [editorial]. *Jornal do Dia*, Porto Alegre, 01/26/1947, p. 4.

episcopate. In this article, the greatest interest will be centered on circulars relating to state elections and the work of the Catholic Electoral League⁵.

Voting as a serious duty of Catholics

On December 2, 1945, elections were held to choose the President of the Republic, in addition to deputies and senators for the formation of the National Constituent Assembly. After an electoral fast of more than 10 years, the regime led by Getúlio Vargas ended and the election, still called by decree signed by the dictator of the New State at the beginning of that year, would start the redemocratization of the country. In electoral terms, this democratic regime would be established quite differently from previous periods, not only because of the mandatory nature of political parties to be national, but because of the significant expansion and change in the profile of the electorate: larger, more urban, with a greater presence of women and urban workers⁶.

After more than 10 years without elections, and with the expressive increase of the electorate (more than 500% in the comparison between 1934 and 1945), for the vast majority of voters the vote was something new on the eve of the 1945 election. The press would play an important role in disseminating information about the election and the act of voting, with instructions to the electorate and attribution of meaning about the vote. In the Catholic press, it would be no different. In its pages, however, incitements to the electorate would consist of a markedly anti-communist narrative, endowing the act of voting with a specific sense of duty to fulfill.

The *Correio Rio-Grandense*, a few days before the elections of December 2, 1945, sought to instruct voters regarding the act of voting. At that time, there was no official electoral ballot issued by the Electoral Court. Thus, the voter should arrive at the voting section in possession of the ballots, printed by the parties or typed by himself, which he would like to insert, under the protection of the unavoidable booth, in the envelope - this one is official and stamped by the Electoral Court. According to the newspaper, voters should remember

⁵ It should be noted that, although the 1891 Constitution promoted the legal separation between State and Church, throughout the twentieth century the Catholic Church sought a political insertion in order to expand its areas of activity and, in the long run, recrystallize civil institutions (ROSA, 2011).

⁶ These changes were pointed out in several works, with emphasis on the transformations in the Brazilian electorate, with the extension of citizenship to the working classes, pointed out by Gláucio Ary Dillon Soares (1973). John French (1998) analyzed the impact of the *ex-officio* modality in the enlistment in 1945, as a Vargas strategy to create an urban and industrial balance for the electorate of rural areas dominated by the oligarchies. There is also the work of Jairo Nicolau (2001) on the history of voting in Brazil. On the interpretations about the incorporation of urban workers to the electorate, see Angeli (2016).

that three separate ballots were needed, one for president, one for senator and one for federal deputy. Then, the voting ritual was explained in each of its stages:

The voter must go to the section with their ballots. When called, he/she must declare his/her name and present his/her electoral title. You will subscribe and receive an empty envelope. You will go to the cabinet and fold the three banknotes in half or in four and place them inside the envelope, closing the envelope - for that he will have a minute. Leaving the cabinet, the voter will show the closed envelope to the president and the inspectors and, from his/her own hand, will deposit the envelope in the ballot box. You will then receive your electoral title and the voter will leave the enclosure⁷.

Up to this point, the Capuchin friars' newspaper is no different from what is published about the elections in newspapers of the major commercial press in Porto Alegre, such as the *Correio do Povo* and the *Diário de Notícias*⁸. There were differences, however, in the sense that voting was attributed. Catholics should vote in the same way as everyone else, but the reason for the vote was given a specific meaning. A few weeks before the election, an article signed under the pseudonym of *Alabardeiro*, had as its theme the female vote⁹. For the author of the article, published in *Correio Rio-Grandense*, women's right to vote was something convenient to Christian principles, because "women have a feeling of the deepest good; and because the man materializes much more quickly than the woman". The text made reference to the words of Pope Pius XII, who would have repeatedly called on Christian women to take part in the elections and "compete with his vote to save the Homeland and Religion". Thus, women, who had won the right to vote in the previous decade, had a duty to God in suffrage: "Catholic women should not be afraid to vote, but to build up courage and do their duty. God wants it!"¹⁰.

The theme of the duty to vote before the Homeland and the Church would be resumed on the eve of the 1947 state elections. After the promulgation of the 1946 Constitution, it was time to redemocratize the States, with elections to choose governors and

⁷ HOW we will do it to vote. *Correio Rio-Grandense*, Garibaldi/RS, 11/28/1945, p. 2.

⁸ Analyzed to produce a sub-chapter on the role of the press in the construction of voters in the initial phase of the democratic experience (1945-1954), part of the author's doctoral thesis, in progress. The newspapers were consulted at the Hipólito José da Costa Social Communication Museum.

⁹ Mônica Karawejczyk (2013) highlights the rapprochement between the Brazilian Federation for Female Progress with the Catholic Church in the late 1920s, as overcoming an obstacle to the conquest of the female vote in Brazil - a right acquired from the 1932 Electoral Code.

¹⁰ ABOUT feminism. *Correio Rio-Grandense*, Garibaldi/RS, 11/07/1945, cover.

state deputies to form constituent assemblies in each unit of the federation. As the Magna Carta was only promulgated in September 1946, the elections were scheduled for January 1947. This worried the recently installed metropolitan archbishop of Porto Alegre, D. Vicente Scherer. In a circular sent to the priests, on December 17, 1946, D. Vicente stresses the danger of great electoral abstention arising from the fact that the election is taking place during the summer. Therefore, he recommended that two priests perform two tasks. First, it was necessary to take advantage of “all occasions, especially masses on Sundays and holy days (including Christmas) to inculcate the obligation to vote”, which also extended, “in all its gravity, to people traveling or vacationing”.

Thus, the archbishop's concern with the issue of voting is perceived, with electoral abstention being a problem to be avoided. The circular offers us an important indication of the voter construction work operated by the Catholic Church: the quest to inculcate the obligation to vote among Catholics - through their liturgical practices, including, and not only through the narrative of the Catholic press. With this, it is possible to say that in addition to being an agent among others in this electoral mobilization (together with Electoral Justice, press, political parties, associations), the Church had not only an engaged press, but also a means of communication that could be used to incite electoral participation: the mass, in a way sacralizing the act of voting and endowing the duty to abstain from such duty. Another means of mobilization was in the second task mentioned in D. Vicente's circular: the Catholic Electoral League (LEC), which we will discuss later. The important thing here is to understand another Church strategy to try to avoid abstention: LEC members should advise the electorate on the formalities necessary to request the vote outside their municipality¹¹.

This concern was reinforced by the Catholic press, as can be seen in the pages of *Correio Rio-Grandense*. On January 8, 1947, a few days before the state election, the newspaper announced: “VOTING is a serious duty for all Catholics. Those who do not vote commit a serious crime against their country and against the Church. Catholics, spare no sacrifices to fulfill your duty to vote and vote well!” [emphasis added]¹². Thus, the vote would not simply be a duty of civic citizenship, but a duty before the Church and, due to the effects of mediation between the world of mortals and the transcendent world, a duty of the Catholic voter before God. But, as can be seen, the *how* and *why* of the vote of Catholics also had one *for what*. It was necessary to vote and vote well. Not to vote was to sin by omission and that

¹¹ Circular n. 21, 12/17/1946. *Unitas - Bulletin of the Ecclesiastical Province of Porto Alegre*, Jan-Mar 1947, p. 61.

¹² VOTING is a grave duty for all Catholics. *Correio Rio-Grandense*, Garibaldi/RS, 01/08/1947, p. 2.

sin had consequences. As well as voting, but not voting well. These are categories that have sought to incite Catholics to vote and which we will analyze in the following sections.

The sin of omission and the strengthening of enemies

During the 1950 electoral period, when they would be elected president of the republic, state governors, senators and federal and state deputies, the *Correio Rio-Grandense* published, in the section entitled *Correspondence Caipira*, a kind of chronicle about the importance of voting. The text was written in the form of a language attributed to the humble people of the interior, the “hillbilly people”, and that is why the plural title was purposefully absent from the plural: The *rallies*. After narrating picturesque events at rallies promoted by political parties, the text deals with a fictitious discussion between the “hillbilly” about the vote:

They discussed inaction, voting. This in a wheel: I do not vote, what a hope! I don't have time to lose. Imagine if I'll vote ... What does the government pay me to vote... I never get paid! - Yeah, this is a good one, the government never paid us to vote!!!

They laughed and mocked. One guy got a word in the conversation and proceed like this:

- 'Yes, you can stop voting. After that, the government pays for you, like the Russian government pays for those who did not vote. How are the governments of Europe paying voters who did not vote...'

- But they really paid, buddy?

- They do. Then, you didn't see how those governments terminated millions of people. They put all slaves like animals. They stole everything. Now just moaning. They did not go to vote. Now the government paid ...

- God forbid, I'll vote even if it's dragged. But I'll go¹³.

In the chronicle, the characters who discussed in a circle intended to abstain from the right to vote, because they would not receive any reward. A third person, who observes them, intervenes, alluding to the Russian Revolution, which would have enslaved Russian citizens and killed millions. As Rodrigo Patto Sá Motta (2002) points out, the clash between communism and anti-communism in Brazil had, in terms of the imaginary, as one of the important points the battle over representations about the Soviet Union. According to the

¹³ CORRESPONDÊNCIA Caipira. The *rallies*. *Correio Rio-Grandense*, Garibaldi/RS, 9/27/1950, p. 5.

author, in this “propaganda war, the anti-communists endeavored to attack the socialist countries, pointing out the existence of all sorts of miseries” (MOTTA, 2002, p. 97). Thus, the narrative present in the chronicle fits into this logic of attributing to Soviet Russia a massacre and enslavement of its own people. According to Motta (2002), the images constructed by anti-communism about communism exalted the aspect of the people's slavery, a representation also present in the *Correio Rio-Grandense* chronicle. In his narrative, however, the cause of the people's enslavement would have been their indifference to electoral participation: they would not have gone to vote. Voting, therefore, would be a way to prevent the same thing from happening in Brazil: to vote, even if it was “dragging”.

For this Catholic press vehicle, electoral abstention would favor the infiltration of communism in Brazil. Failing to vote meant strengthening the enemy. This is the argument of the article published in the Capuchin newspaper on December 18, 1946, a month before the state elections. Authored by the writer of the periodical, José Bizoto, *To stop voting is to vote for the enemy* synthesizes this logic. For him, the vote was a “powerful weapon” and, for “real Catholics”, it should assume “a special force”, because the suffrage would be responsible for bringing to the government “competent and honest men, or wicked and atheists”. Wicked and atheists was a way of referring to communists, who, according to the article, had already realized the strength of the vote and were in the middle of an election campaign.

It is important to note that, at that time, the Communist Party of Brazil was experiencing its brief legality, competing with candidates for state deputies in the 1947 elections. In the previous election, in 1945, the party had elected 14 federal deputies, one from Rio Grande do Sul, in addition to the election of Luis Carlos Prestes to the Senate (CHILCOTE, 1982). The argument that the communists were campaigning was therefore feasible, so much so that, at the end of that election, the party would elect three state deputies, obtaining 5.76% of the votes (NOLL; TRINDADE, 1995). The electoral strength of the Communists was that it was clearly overestimated. But, as we will see later, communism was not the only enemy present in this narrative and its danger would also consist of infiltrating other party acronyms.

If the communists were already campaigning, realizing the importance of attending the polls, as the article would be time for Catholics to mobilize as well, as abstention would favor the red enemy: “If we don't go to the polls, the bad guys will go and choose worse

elements. Every voter who fails to appear at the polls, votes for enemies because it weakens the strength of the good and at the same time reinforces the lines of the bad”¹⁴.

When dealing with the use of the press as a source for History, Heloísa de Faria Cruz and Maria do Rosário Cunha Peixoto (2007) emphasize the importance of, in methodological terms, not losing the series or the editorial set of the studied journal. The isolation of an excerpt can remove possibilities for analysis, especially regarding the relations between the excerpt and other elements present on the page. In the case of the article *To stop voting is to vote for the enemy*, the publication, on the cover, offers reading in conjunction with another article and with an image published on the opposite side [see image I].

The main article emphasizes the idea that the failure of the Catholic voter could result in the election of the bad, the enemies, the wicked and atheists. Below, there is an article dealing with the one that personified communism in Brazil: Luis Carlos Prestes. On the opposite side of the page, there was an image that was not an illustration of any specific article but related to both. According to the caption, it would be a photograph alluding to the Spanish civil war, in the late 1930s, and, portrayed, there would be communists who held the heads of Catholics killed in the conflict¹⁵. The "enemy", thus, became much more dangerous and the need to fight it even more imperative. The vote would be a means of preventing its advance¹⁶.

¹⁴ BIZOTO, José. To stop voting is to vote for the enemy. *Correio Rio-Grandense, Garibaldi/RS*, 12/18/1946, cover.

¹⁵ According to Rodrigo Patto Sá Motta (2002), the Spanish civil war was the main moment of Catholic anti-communism, since the Church accused the revolutionaries of murdering priests and nuns, among other hostile actions. This coincided with the first major wave of anti-communism in Brazil after the 1935 communist insurrection.

¹⁶ The theme of the Spanish civil war would reappear in 1950 in the same newspaper, in an article signed by Father Ambrósio Capuchin and entitled *Às urnas, às urnas!* The argument was that communist parties won in Spain in 1936 and led the country to revolution for two reasons: first, "because many Catholics did not vote"; second, "because many Catholics voted for bad candidates." *ÀS URNAS, às urnas! Correio Rio-Grandense, Garibaldi/RS*, 09/20/1950, cover.

Image 1 - Cover of the newspaper Correio Rio-Grandense (12/18/1946)



Memory Center of the City Council of Caxias do Sul/RS.

The collective letter of the gaucho bishops, released in 1945, made it quite clear, at the time of the country's redemocratization, that communism should be considered the main enemy of "Christian civilization". There, too, there was a censure of omission: at that moment, neutrality in the face of communism would be criminal¹⁷. Just before the 1947 state elections, this reprehensible tone reappears in a circular signed by D. Vicente Scherer: "Going to the ballots and voting for worthy and capable candidates is a duty of conscience to which no one can be exempt. Any indifference would be criminal because it results in denationalizing and atheistic communism" [emphasis added]. There is, therefore, a strong repudiation of Catholics' electoral abstention, since enlistment and attendance at the ballots were considered a moral duty for Catholics of both sexes, according to the archbishop¹⁸.

¹⁷ COMMUNISM and the national moment. Collective letter from the episcopate of Rio Grande do Sul. 07/05/1945. *Unitas - Bulletin of the Ecclesiastical Province of Porto Alegre*. Jul-Sep 1945, p. 181.

¹⁸ Circular n.º 20. 11/01/1946. *Unitas - Bulletin of the Ecclesiastical Province of Porto Alegre*. Oct-Dec 1946, p. 61.

If the Communist Party was seen as the main enemy to be repelled by the Catholic voter, it was not, however, the only one. An article by the *Correio Rio-Grandense* writer, José Bizoto, also repudiated the Democratic Left, a socialist party that had emerged in opposition to Getúlio Vargas. The criticism of the socialists was based on the fact that the party affirmed, in its program, that it did not have a “philosophical conception of life or religious creed”. In addition, the article accused the acronym of being in favor of divorce and of refusing to answer the questionnaire of the Catholic Electoral League (LEC)¹⁹. The LEC, formed by the parish boards and the state board, with members appointed by Catholic Action and by the priests, had the task of guiding the Catholic electorate about candidates in tune with the principles defended by the Church.

From the 1950 elections, with the Communist Party of Brazil already declared illegal, the concern of the Catholic press became the infiltration of communists in other acronyms, with which the Catholic voter should be careful. In an editorial of September 12, 1950, a few weeks before the election, *Jornal do Dia* accused the Social Popular Party (PSP) and the Party of the Republic (PR) of harboring communist candidates. According to the editorial, they would be collaborating with traitors:

One sees, on the one hand, the insistence of Brazil's enemies, the traitors of its own people, to abolish themselves in public posts and offices, so that they can better continue in the practice of their crimes, in an attempt to surrender the nation to Soviet slavery. On the other hand, it is evident, in our appalled eyes, how democratic parties are venalized by not retreating even in the face of the collaboration that, with their gesture, they give to the calabars of the Homeland! The parties that do this [...] deserve the public repudiation of true Brazilians²⁰.

Again, the presence of the argument related to Soviet slavery is perceived, and the Communists are therefore enemies of the Homeland. Even though the Communist Party no longer legally exists, the Catholic voter should be attentive and repudiate the parties that housed among his cadres communist candidates. The following day, September 13, the editorial would advance on this theme: in addition to being infiltrated by other parties, the communists were organizing for the elections. And that led, once again, to the need for Catholics to organize in order to electoral mobilization: the “bad guys, the enemies of Brazil and God” would be willing to go to the polls on October 3, 1950 and, for this reason, the

¹⁹ BIZOTO, José. Left yes, democratic no! *Correio Rio-Grandense, Garibaldi/RS*, 11/06/1946, cover.

²⁰ COMMUNISTS and the [editorial] elections. *Jornal do Dia*, Porto Alegre, 09/12/1950, p. 4.

"Good" - "those from whom the Homeland and the Church can hope" could not abstain. By abstaining, they would be committing a fault by default and giving "enemies of the family man, Brazil and God", a strength that they themselves did not have²¹.

Thus, the editorials of *Jornal do Dia* present a similar argument to the articles published in the *Correio Rio-Grandense* in the previous election: the electoral abstention of Catholics would serve to strengthen the enemies represented by communism. The Catholic voter was thus encouraged to go to the ballots and vote. But also "voting well". What did it mean to "vote well"?

Vote well: the Catholic Electoral League

The Catholic Electoral League was created in 1932, under the baton of Cardinal D. Sebastião Leme, from Rio de Janeiro, and with a view to the elections to form the constituent assembly. The objective was, by guiding the vote of the Catholic electorate, to ensure that the Constitution was drafted within Catholic principles (ROSA, 2011, p. 197-198). In 1945, as elections for a new constituent approached, LEC was again organized, promoting enlistment and intense propaganda work in newspapers and radio. At the time, a Catholic rally was held, attended by 50 thousand people, marking the official installation of LEC (RODEGHERO, 2017, p. 185-186).

The new Constitution had not yet been promulgated when, in July 1946, the archbishop of Porto Alegre, D. João Becker²², died. In January 1947, in the month of the state elections, D. Vicente Scherer was installed. In the previous months, as capitular vicar, D. Vicente had already taken steps to install the LEC. A collective circular from the gaúcho bishops in November highlighted the need to organize LEC in each of the parishes, with the aim of enlisting new voters and guiding those already enlisted. The document stated that the Communists were "committed [...] to getting better results than in the past elections" and that was why it was "necessary to warn [...] that no Catholic can collaborate, in any way whatsoever, with those elements hostile"²³.

²¹ THE INFLUENCE of the vote [editorial]. *Jornal do Dia*, Porto Alegre, 09/13/1950, p. 4.

²² João Becker (1870-1946) was a native of Germany, arrived in Brazil at the age of eight. He studied at the Colégio dos Jesuítas in São Leopoldo and later at the Seminar in Porto Alegre, also directed by the priests of the Society of Jesus. It was ordained in 1896. By designation of Pius X, he was bishop of Santa Catarina between 1908 and 1912 and archbishop of Porto Alegre between 1912 and 1946 (CPDOC, entry available at: <http://www.fgv.br/cpdoc/acervo/dicionarios/verbete-biografico/becker-joao>).

²³ Collective circular of the bishops of Rio Grande do Sul. *Unitas - Bulletin of the Ecclesiastical Province of Porto Alegre*, Oct-Dec 1946, p. 302.

The enlistment work on the part of LEC is also noticeable through the advertisements in the press, as in the image below:

Image 2 - Announcement of the LEC Electoral Qualification Post (1950)



Source: *Jornal do Dia*, Porto Alegre, 06/25/1950, p. 4.

In addition to promoting qualification with a view to electoral enlistment and encouraging attendance at the polls, LEC had another important task: consulting candidates for positions in the Legislative and Executive branches using a questionnaire and then disseminating the list of candidates considered in solidarity with the guidelines of the Catholic Church and still those considered preferential for the vote of Catholics. According to the *Proclamation of the Catholic Electoral League* in 1950, no one could deny the Church "the right to seek to know the ideology and trends of those who present themselves to the people as deserving to represent them in the organs of civil power". This is because the Church would be the "official organ of political and religious orientation of the great Catholic electorate"²⁴. The editorial of *Jornal do Dia*, in the September 17, 1950 edition, emphasized the work of LEC: it calls on the "Catholic electorate to exercise their vote and urges them to use this great weapon of democracy to defend, with dismay and courage, the ideological values of the Church, which are, at the same time, the main foundations of the social building"²⁵.

In addition to the repudiation of communism, what were the guidelines to which candidates for elective office who wanted to rely on the blessings of LEC should commit themselves to? The answer is also found in the Catholic press. Father Ambrósio, Capuchin,

²⁴ PROCLAMATION of the Catholic Electoral League. *Unitas - Bulletin of the Ecclesiastical Province of Porto Alegre*, Sept 1950, p. 201 - 202.

²⁵ VOTE well [editorial]. *Jornal do Dia*, Porto Alegre, 09/17/1950, p. 4.

recalled, in an article published in the *Correio Rio-Grandense* on August 16, 1950, entitled *Catholics and politics*, the words of Archbishop Vicente Scherer when affirming that the Church did not express itself on matters merely politicians. There were, however, political issues that had a close connection, in his understanding, with moral and religious principles: “Such are marriage, the family, education, public morality and others. In these cases, the Church has the mission to intervene”²⁶. The *Jornal do Dia* editorial also followed a similar argument, listing the following points: Defense of indissoluble marriage, recognition of religious marriage, religious education in public schools, barracks, prisons and hospitals.

Thus, enlistment and attendance at the polls was considered a serious duty of Catholics. But, according to the archbishopric circulars and also according to the articles and editorials of engaged press vehicles, it would not be enough to vote, as it was necessary to vote well. According to the *Jornal do Dia* editorial on September 17, 1950, voting well was “voting according to LEC's guidelines”²⁷. In this regard, the *Proclamation of the Episcopate Rio-Grandense*, of September 1950, left no doubt: “LEC's guidelines and recommendations” should be “religiously observed, for the good of the Nation and the Church”²⁸.

Final considerations

The mobilization around the vote, aiming at building an interest in electoral competition and for suffrage as a means of political participation, occurs in a dispute between different agents interested in its effects, that is, it is a construction disputed by the agents that have in the market some interest. The citizen, legally able to become a voter, finds himself challenged and incited by state agencies, political parties, associations and institutions that seek, in various ways, to intervene in political competition or even to institute it. It is clear that the Catholic Church, in the case studied, sought to take part in this construction.

The enlistment and attendance of Catholics at the polls were important issues within a larger project, of the Church, of guiding political institutions according to their moral and religious principles. The Catholic voter should enlist and vote. Abstention would be considered a serious fault, a sin, a criminal attitude towards those who placed themselves as mediators between the earthly world and the spiritual world. Catholic writers and publishers went so far as to say that silent voters would have to be accountable to God. This

²⁶ AMBROSIO, Father. Catholics and politics. *Correio Rio-Grandense, Garibaldi/RS*, 08/16/1950, cover.

²⁷ VOTE well [editorial]. *Jornal do Dia*, Porto Alegre, 9/17/1950, p. 4.

²⁸ PROCLAMATION of the Rio Grande do Sul bishops. *Unitas - Bulletin of the Ecclesiastical Province of Porto Alegre*, Sept 1950, p. 200.

is because abstention would favor those who were defined as enemies of the Church and the Homeland: the Communists, who, in turn, engaged in this same dispute for votes.

The Church sought to promote interest in the vote and to frame that vote within specific guidelines, through the direct action of the priests, including at masses, but also through two powerful tools: the press and the Catholic Electoral League. Throughout this article, it was possible to notice that the opinions expressed in the pages of *Correio Rio-Grandense* and *Jornal do Dia*, far from simply reproducing the views of its collaborators and editors, were clearly aligned with the archbishopric's strategy regarding electoral mobilization among Catholics. In addition to seeking to build an interest in voting, the act of voting was endowed with a specific meaning and articulated to the Church's intervention guidelines before the State: the Catholic voter should vote and vote well, not only impeding the electoral advance of communists and socialists, but electing candidates committed to Catholic principles, which are proclaimed by the Catholic Electoral League.

In this set of incitations, present in the guidelines of the archbishopric to the priests, in the press publications and in the work of LEC, an anti-communist narrative was offered to the Catholic voter under construction and framed within the framework of the religious intervention project in the public space whose posts were in dispute. Therefore, the role of the Catholic Church, by various means of influence, cannot be neglected when considering the grammar with which the Brazilian citizen learned to become a voter.

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