

History, Sociology and the Political Conflicts of the 1920s in São Paulo, Brazil

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Abstract. In recent years an ‘ethno-economic’ interpretation of politics in the coffee state of São Paulo in the early twentieth century, associated particularly with the work of Mauricio Font, has gained widespread acceptance. Its claim that state politics in the period was increasingly shaped by a cleavage between a declining traditional coffee aristocracy on the one hand, and a rising, mostly immigrant, smallholding and industrial economy on the other, is challenged here. It is argued, in part on the basis of a re-examination of the sources used by Font, that ideological rather than economic concerns motivated the Liga Nacional, while at county level, in Araras and elsewhere, personal and clientelistic motives continued to shape political loyalties. Finally, the argument that the Partido Democrático was driven primarily by ‘Big Coffee’ reaction to the PRP is shown to be unfounded.

A word of caution is appropriate here about the modern tendency to find economically based forms of social protest behind all [socio-political] movements. It is nearly always possible to find an economic aspect in any social movement. But such a discovery cannot justify the claim that economically based protest constitutes the most important part of the explanation. To discover what is important it is necessary to ascertain all the forces at work, to assess on the basis of specific evidence their relative importance and relationship to each other.

Barrington Moore, Jr., *Injustice*

At the turn of the twentieth century the Brazilian state of São Paulo ranked as the most important coffee-producing area in the world. An ever-growing railway network cut across the *paulista* countryside, its rolling stock carrying coffee for export through the port of Santos in hundreds of thousands of 60-kilogramme sacks. Over the course of the three decades that followed, São Paulo also acquired the largest industrial plant in Latin America. Along with this economic might and an ever-growing population (over 6 million people by 1930), the state of São Paulo enjoyed political preeminence within the federal system established by the Constitution of 1891, providing four of Brazil’s nine elected presidents over the next thirty-nine years.¹

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¹ One of these four *paulista* statesmen was elected to the presidency for a second, non-consecutive term, but failing health prevented his inauguration; a fifth was elected to the presidency in 1930, but never took office.

However, this period also witnessed acute political conflict within São Paulo, particularly during the 1910s and 1920s. These were years in which the state's political system – formally republican, but oligarchic in structure – was subject to extreme pressure as it came under criticism and opposition from various quarters.

Turning from history to historiography, there are some impressive monographs that deal with the political history of São Paulo during this crucial period.² Taking a broader view, however, it remains a field in which vague generalities abound: the 'paulista oligarchy', the 'coffee aristocracy', the ubiquitously emergent middle class, and an indistinct social actor to which scholars have given the unintentionally oxymoronic title of the 'dissident oligarchy'.

Arguably the most influential interpretation of *paulista* politics during the critical early decades of the twentieth century, at least among scholars working in English, has been that put forward by sociologist Mauricio A. Font.³ In *Coffee, Contention, and Change*, Font argues that a process of 'export-sector segmentation' had, by the 1920s, manifested itself in the obsolescence of traditional, large-scale coffee agriculture ('Big Coffee', in the author's shorthand) with the rise of an alternative economy based on mostly immigrant smallholding and industry. This ethno-economic cleavage was mirrored in increasing conflict ('contention', in the lexicon borrowed from Charles Tilly) between sectors of *paulista* society representative of 'Big Coffee' and an independent Paulista Republican Party (PRP) linked to immigrant – particularly Italian-immigrant – smallholders and industry. This conflict, in turn, is rendered as the decisive cause of nearly every imaginable political conflict or public mobilisation right down to the 'Revolution of 1930', most notably the county-level politicking of the early 1920s and the

² Among the stronger historical monographs dealing with *paulista* politics in these years are: Dióres Santos Abreu, *Formação histórica de uma cidade pioneira paulista: Presidente Prudente* (Presidente Prudente, 1972); José Ênio Casalecchi, *O Partido Republicano Paulista: política e poder, 1889–1926* (São Paulo, 1987); Anna Maria Martinez Corrêa, *A rebelião de 1924 em São Paulo* (São Paulo, 1976); Boris Fausto, *A revolução de 30: historiografia e história*, 16th ed. (São Paulo, 1997 [1970]); Sílvia Levi-Moreira, 'Liberalismo e democracia na dissidência republicana paulista: estudo sobre o Partido Republicano Dissidente de São Paulo, 1901–1906,' tese de doutorado, Universidade de São Paulo, 1991; Maria Lígia Coelho Prado, *A democracia ilustrada: o Partido Democrático de São Paulo, 1926–1934* (São Paulo, 1986); Elias Thomé Saliba, 'Ideologia liberal e oligarquia paulista: a atuação e as idéias de Cincinato Braga, 1891–1930,' tese de doutorado, Universidade de São Paulo, 1981; Rodolpho Telarolli, *Poder local na república velha* (São Paulo, 1977); Eliana Tadeu Terzi, 'A cidade na primeira república: imprensa, política e poder em Piracicaba,' tese de doutorado, Universidade de São Paulo, 1997. Not a monograph in the traditional sense, Joseph L. Love's *São Paulo in the Brazilian Federation, 1889–1937* (Stanford, 1980) remains an essential reference work.

³ Mauricio A. Font, *Coffee, Contention, and Change in the Making of Modern Brazil* (Cambridge, MA, 1990).

statewide campaigns of the Nationalist League (LN) and the Democratic Party (PD).⁴

With one major exception, this interpretation was lauded, even by ‘scholars whose work it consciously challenges’.⁵ Following this initial reception, Font’s assertion that ethno-economic conflict fuelled the political crises of the 1920s found its way into synthetic and monographic works published in the United States.⁶ Even Brazilian scholars – who for many good reasons are usually not particularly moved by the work of researchers

⁴ See, for example, *Coffee, Contention, and Change*, p. 272: ‘The movement to restore [planter] hegemony and the power struggle was real and coherent. The associational agitation of the early 1920s was the beginning of the planter reaction. The movement was also adumbrated at a different level in localized political conflicts and in the Rebellion of 1924. After mid-decade, the interplay between the two main camps in which Paulista society was increasingly divided more clearly expressed durable conflict and the loss of Big Coffee power. With the formation of the Partido Democrático in 1926 the elite response took a more definite political form. Contentiousness, now centered on this party, took place in spite of efforts at conciliation, such as that attempted by Júlio Prestes in mid-1927. The restorative reaction focused on the reaffirmation of political dominance. Mobilized Big Coffee elites spoke of their actions against the ruling Partido Republicano Paulista in clear class terms. The mobilized vanguard saw its role as class organising and agitation. Flanked by well-read and modernizing journalists – “organic intellectuals,” Gramsci might have called a number of them – they undertook a deliberate plan of action. They developed consciousness of the predicament of the traditional elite as well as an agenda of political and ideological struggles which focused explicitly on driving out political “usurpers,” neutralizing the immigrants, and restoring traditional coffee elites to their rightful political and hegemonic position.’

⁵ See Warren Dean’s review in *JLAS*, vol. 23, no. 3 (Oct. 1991), pp. 649–50, and Thomas E. Skidmore’s review in the *Hispanic American Historical Review*, vol. 72, no. 1 (Feb. 1992), pp. 116–17. Cf., respectively: Dean, *The Industrialization of São Paulo, 1880–1945* (Austin, 1969) and ‘The Planter as Entrepreneur: The Case of São Paulo,’ *Hispanic American Historical Review*, vol. 46, no. 2 (May 1966), pp. 138–152; and Skidmore, *Black into White: Race and Nationality in Brazilian Thought*, 2nd ed. (Durham, NC, 1993 [1974]), pp. 157–9. The quote is from W. Ladd Hollist’s review in *American Political Science Review*, vol. 86, no. 1 (March 1992), p. 267. See also the reviews by Brazilianist historians Robert M. Levine (*American Historical Review*, vol. 97, no. 5 [Dec. 1992], pp. 1635–6) and Richard Graham (*American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 97, no. 5 [March 1992], pp. 1502–4). The exception is Joseph L. Love. See his ‘Of Planters, Politics, and Development,’ *Latin American Research Review*, vol. 24, no. 3 (1989), 127–35, written in response to an early presentation of the ethno-economic thesis, and his review in *Luso-Brazilian Review*, vol. 29, no. 1 (1992), pp. 124–6.

⁶ Brian P. Owensby, *Intimate Ironies: Modernity and the Making of Middle-Class Lives in Brazil* (Stanford, 1999), p. 261 no. 131; Thomas E. Skidmore, *Brazil: Five Centuries of Change* (New York, 1999), pp. 108, 243; Cliff Welch, *The Seed Was Planted: The São Paulo Roots of Brazil’s Rural Labor Movement, 1924–1964* (University Park, 1999), esp. pp. 38–46, 52–3; Joel Wolfe, *Working Women, Working Men: São Paulo and the Rise of Brazil’s Industrial Working Class, 1900–1955* (Durham, NC, 1993), pp. 215 n98, 220 n1, 226 n51. Comparing the portions of John D. French’s ‘Industrial Workers and the Origin of Populist Politics in the ABC Region of Greater São Paulo, Brazil, 1900–1950’, unpubl. PhD diss., Yale University, 1985, and his *The Brazilian Worker’s ABC: Class Conflict and Class Alliances in Modern São Paulo* (Chapel Hill, 1992), that deal with political conflict in the mid-to-late-1920s (pp. 69–103 and pp. 44–7, respectively), one gathers that this labour historian was also won over by Font’s interpretation of paulista politics.

writing in English – took notice of his work.⁷ Indeed, it would not be an exaggeration to state that over the course of the 1990s the ethno-economic interpretation of political conflict in São Paulo came to exert a significant influence on how scholars think about the history of twentieth-century Brazil.

However, despite its broad appeal and apparent social-scientific sophistication, the ethno-economic explanation for the political conflicts of the 1920s is demonstrably false, often on the basis of the very same sources offered up as evidence in *Coffee, Contention, and Change*. Politics in São Paulo in the 1920s did not revolve around the issues of agricultural diversification, industrialisation and nativism. On the contrary, *paulista* politics were, above all else, *political*, and the most important conflicts of the period were over political ideas, political traditions, and public and private goods obtainable through existing political and administrative structures. That the school-boy patriots and liberal intellectuals who were the principal leaders of the Nationalist League and the Democratic Party were motivated primarily (but not exclusively) by ideology, and that county-level conflicts between local notables in the *paulista* interior were driven, in the main (but again, not exclusively), by clientelistic and personalistic concerns, may appear to some to be hopelessly conservative conclusions (others, taking a broader view, might differ), but they are nevertheless fully borne out by reams of evidence.

The Nationalist League of São Paulo

The Nationalist League was founded by students and faculty of São Paulo's institutions of higher learning between late 1916 and mid 1917.⁸ Prior to the emergence of the ethno-economic explanation, interpretations of the League

⁷ Fausto, *A revolução de 30*, 14; Fausto, *Historiografia da imigração para São Paulo* (São Paulo, 1991), pp. 18, 20–24, 43, 45–47; Fausto et al., *Imigração e política em São Paulo* (São Paulo, 1995), pp. 20–1; Renato M. Perissinotto, 'Estado, capital cafeeiro e crise política na década de 1920 em São Paulo, Brasil,' *Hispanic American Historical Review*, vol. 80, no. 2 (May 2000), pp. 299–332; R.M. Perissinotto, 'Estado, capital cafeeiro e política tributária na economia paulista exportadora, 1889–1930,' *Latin American Research Review*, vol. 36, no. 1 (2001), pp. 151–169; R.M. Perissinotto, *Estado e capital cafeeiro em São Paulo, 1889–1930* (São Paulo, 2000).

⁸ In December 1916, a founding meeting took place ('Notas e informações', *O Estado de S. Paulo*, 16 Dec. 1916, p. 5), although the League did not begin activity in earnest until late July 1917, when the LN's Deliberative Council took office (Paulo Nogueira Filho, *Ideais e lutas de um burguês progressista: o Partido Democrático e a revolução de 1930*, 2 vols. [São Paulo, 1958], pp. 73–4). As a result, there is some confusion over whether it was founded in 1916 or 1917. See Sílvia Levi-Moreira, 'Ideologia e atuação da Liga Nacionalista de São Paulo, 1917–1924,' *Revista de História*, vol. 116 (1984), pp. 67–74; idem, 'A luta pelo voto secreto no programa da Liga Nacionalista de São Paulo, 1916–1924,' *Revista Brasileira de História*, vol. 7 (March 1984), pp. 72–80; Paul Manor, 'The Liga Nacionalista de São Paulo: A Political Reformist Group in Paulista Academic of Yore, 1917–1924,' *Jahrbuch für Geschichte von Staat, Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft Lateinamerika*, vol. 17 (1980), pp. 317–53.

were remarkably similar; for friend, foe, and former member alike, the Nationalist League was an ideologically motivated civic association that had its base in the social and intellectual elite of *paulistano* society.⁹ According to Font, however, the LN was an ‘organization whose campaign aimed at undermining the power of the political “oligarchs” in the PRP’, and thus part of a larger reaction by ‘Big Coffee’. Complementing the League’s anti-government aims was the ‘anti-immigrant, even xenophobic, stance in the movement’.¹⁰ The historian Cliff Welch has gone even further, referring to the League as ‘an anti-immigrant SRB front group’ and ‘xenophobic’.¹¹

The attempt to link the Nationalist League to ‘Big Coffee’ reaction is strained by the fact that even a casual examination of its history reveals important figures in *paulista* industry among its leaders. The large textile industrialist Jorge Street was a member of the League’s Deliberative Council.¹² Another prominent leader with ties to industry was Horácio Lafer, the scion of a Lithuanian family that came to Brazil and eventually founded a paper factory that became one of the state’s most important industrial establishments. In 1928, he would serve on the first board of directors of the Centro das Indústrias do Estado de São Paulo (CIESP).¹³

⁹ Brasil Bandecchi, *A Liga Nacionalista* (São Paulo, 1980); Paulo Duarte, *Memórias*, 10 vols. (São Paulo, 1974–1980), vol. 3, p. 344; Levi-Moreira ‘Ideologia e atuação’ and ‘A luta pelo voto secreto’; Manor ‘*Liga Nacionalista de São Paulo*’; Nogueira Filho, *Ideais e lutas*, pp. 73–77; Skidmore, *Black into White*, pp. 157–159.

¹⁰ Font, *Coffee, Contention, and Change*, pp. 159–160.

¹¹ Welch, *The Seed Was Planted*, pp. 41, 44. The charge that the Nationalist League was a front for the *Sociedade Rural Brasileira* (SRB) is fairly easy to refute: the League was founded in late 1916, whereas the SRB was not founded until 1919. As for its alleged ‘xenophobia’, see below.

¹² Levi-Moreira, ‘Ideologia e atuação’, p. 71. Cf. Font, *Coffee, Contention, and Change*, p. 203: ‘Jorge Street ... spearheaded the articulation of CIESP with PRP’. That Street, who adopted the most substantive social services and protections (schools, nurseries, housing, hygienic working facilities) of any of the factory-owners of the period, would be linked to the League, with its calls for popular education, military service, and political participation, is not strange at all. Indeed, Street’s industrial paternalism and the League’s blend of liberalism, noblesse oblige, and cosmopolitan nation-building were well suited for one another. On Street’s industrial paternalism, see Barbara Weinstein, *For Social Peace in Brazil: Industrialists and the Remaking of the Working Class in São Paulo, 1920–1964* (Chapel Hill, 1996), pp. 23–4, 55–6.

¹³ Jorge Miguel Mayer, ‘Horácio Lafer’, in Alzira Alves de Abreu et al. (eds.), *Dicionário histórico-biográfico brasileiro* (Rio de Janeiro, 2001 [1984]), p. 2998; Nogueira Filho, *Ideais e lutas*, pp. 85, 94, 634; Horacio Lafer to Vergueiro Steidel, São Paulo, 24 Dec. 1920, Arquivo do Instituto Histórico e Geográfico de São Paulo (hereafter AIHGSP), Arquivo Liga Nacionalista (hereafter ALN), pacote 1. The latter document is Lafer’s resignation from the post of second treasurer. In 1922 Lafer was among the LN leaders who called on the ‘paulista electorate’ to vote for those candidates (PRP, anti-PRP, and independent) who supported the introduction of the secret ballot. ‘Ao eleitorado paulista’, *O Estado de S. Paulo*, 21 April 1922, pp. 3–4. A news item in the same issue of the *Estado* indicates that he was at that point a member of a newly founded ‘Comissão de Propaganda Eleitoral do Voto Secreto’. ‘O voto secreto’, p. 4. During the military rebellion of July 1924, when

The examples of Lafer and Street not only serve to refute the implied link with anti-industrialism, they also suggest that labelling the League ‘xenophobic’ is an overstatement. Indeed, by the criteria sometimes employed in *Coffee, Contention, and Change*, Brazilian-born Street and Lafer were themselves ‘immigrants’.¹⁴ These cases are complemented by other examples at the local level.¹⁵

The charge that the League engaged in antigovernment activity is also not nearly as clear as the ethno-economic explanation proposes. At certain points the League received the support of the state government.¹⁶ The reverse was also true: among the group’s earliest members were youths with close ties to the PRP.¹⁷ At points, the Nationalist League did run candidates against some PRP candidates (while continuing to endorse PRP candidates

according to Font, ‘[l]eaders of the Liga Nacionalista took a supportive stand’ behind the rebels (Font, *Coffee, Contention, and Change*, p. 167), Lafer continued to attend LN meetings, now as a member of the League’s Deliberative Council, and helped direct LN efforts to aid the civilian population. *O Estado de S. Paulo*, 13 July 1924, p. 1; *O Estado de S. Paulo*, 15 July 1924, p. 1.

The reader will note that here and elsewhere I have preserved the original Portuguese-language orthography of all of my sources, as I have with surnames, both in citations and text (Moraes rather than Morais, for example). I employ contemporary spellings of given names, place names and ordinals in the text (Horácio rather than Horacio, Tatuí rather than Tatuhy, Júnior rather than Junior).

¹⁴ At one point, Font identifies Street, a second-generation native-born Brazilian (his paternal grandfather, an Englishman, married a Brazilian woman and settled in Brazil), as one of the ‘immigrant merchants and industrialists’ who were increasingly drawn to the São Paulo Commercial Association in the 1910s, and in an appendix Font refers to the criterion of ‘probable nationality derived from inspection of last names’. Font, *Coffee, Contention, and Change*, pp. 110, 294.

¹⁵ Among these local leaders and supporters were: Horacio Berlink and Roberto Zimberger, in the state capital, and Francisco Azzi and Ricieri Brunelli, in the interior towns of Casa Branca and Dobrada, respectively. ‘Acta da assembléa geral da Liga Nacionalista, em 17 de novembro de 1919’, São Paulo, AIHGSP, ALN, pacote 1; Roberto Zimberger to the Nationalist League, São Paulo, 17 Sept. 1920, AIHGSP, ALN, pacote 2; Francisco Azzi to ‘Exmo. Snr.’, Casa Branca, 15 Dec. 1920, AIHGSP, ALN, pacote 2; Duval de Moraes Aguiar, et al., ‘Boletim Eleitoral’, Dobrada, 1 June 1918, AIHGSP, ALN, pacote 1.

¹⁶ Skidmore makes this point in his *Black into White*, p. 157. Throughout its relatively brief existence, the League and the state government cooperated on educational programmes: Washington Luis to Vergueiro Steidel, São Paulo, 25 Nov. 1920, AIHGSP, ALN, pacote 1 (this letter thanked the *Conselho Deliberativo* of the Nationalist League for its support of his educational policies); Washington Luis to Vergueiro Steidel, São Paulo, 8 Dec. 1920, AIHGSP, ALN, pacote 1. During the 1918 yellow fever epidemic, the League provided more effective assistance than the state government and received the support of such *perreipista* luminaries as Altino Arantes, Francisco de Paula Rodrigues Alves, Fernando Prestes, and Dagoberto Salles, not to mention the Matarazzo industrial interests: newspaper clippings in *Livro de recortes e actas*, n.d., AIHGSP, ALN, pacote 1.

¹⁷ Paulo Nogueira Filho mentions Pereira Lima and Abelardo Vergueiro Cesar (*Ideais e lutas*, p. 78).

who voiced their support for the secret ballot),¹⁸ but the timing and content of these campaigns indicate that the suggestion that the LN ‘aimed at undermining the power of the ... PRP’ is an exaggeration and that the League’s on-again, off-again opposition stance had more to do with youthful idealism and the patriot dreams of newspaper-reading cosmopolites than with ethno-economic conflict.

The first independent electoral campaign sponsored by the Nationalist League illustrates this point. It took place in 1918, as the state capital was caught up in the fervour of the First World War, and came after the PRP nominated José Valois de Castro, a *perrepista* federal congressman and reputed Germanophile, as a candidate to the state Senate. This affront to national brio, coming as it did in the wake of German attacks on Brazilian shipping, was too much for the Francophile intellectuals, rowdy students, and patriotic *populares* of the state capital (a year earlier, it had been members of the latter two groups who, alongside resident foreigners from all Allied nations, had cheered the Italian-language *Fanfulla* and sacked the offices of the German-language *Diário Alemão*).¹⁹ The resulting LN-led campaign to elect Luís Pereira Barreto in place of Valois was about upper-class and middle-class Brazilian patriotism and the identification of these groups with the Allies rather than systematic opposition to the PRP on the part of the League.²⁰

The penultimate reference to the Nationalist League in *Coffee, Contention, and Change* is the assertion that the ‘perceived xenophobic sentiment of the Liga was strong enough that in 1921 its leaders publicly denied their “hatred

¹⁸ ‘Ao eleitorado paulista’ (Nationalist League propaganda item), *O Estado de S. Paulo*, 21 April 1922, pp. 3–4; Levi-Moreira, ‘A luta pela voto secreto’, p. 78.

¹⁹ On the sack of the *Diário Alemão* and the events surrounding it, see *O Estado de S. Paulo*, 11 April 1917, pp. 5–6; *O Estado de S. Paulo*, 12 April 1917, pp. 5–6. The term *populares* as used in the city of São Paulo during this period would have included most of the collar-and-tie middle class along with petty merchants, tradesmen, artisans, industrial workers, and the urban poor.

²⁰ During the campaign, further support for the LN from individuals of recent immigrant descent was apparent: on subscription lists circulating among students, in letters of support from physicians in the state capital and local residents in the interior counties of Bariri and Socorro, and on a pro-Pereira Barreto manifesto that carried the signatures of Italo-paulistas Vicente Rao and Agostinho Rizzo alongside the names of other prominent paulistano professionals. Elias Machado de Almeida, et al., to Membros do Comité de Propaganda da Candidatura Pereira Barreto, São Paulo, 25 May 1918; untitled declaration of support from Polytechnica students, São Paulo, n.d.; Costabile Comenale, et al., to Comité de Propaganda da Candidatura Pereira Barreto, São Paulo, n.d.; ‘Candidatura Luiz Pereira Barreto: manifesto da classe medica ao povo’, São Paulo, 19 May 1918; Jorge Oliveira, et al., to ‘Comité Promotora da Candidatura Pereira Barreto’, Bariri, 24 May 1918; Alante Lorensetti and José Ribeiro Pereira to ‘Comité de Estudantes encarregada da propaganda do sabio e patriota dr. Luiz Pereira Barreto’, 18 May 1918; ‘Manifesto em prol da candidatura Pereira Barreto’; all of which are in AIHGSP, ALN, pacote 2.

for immigrants.” Interestingly, one of the statement’s last lines betrays their sentiments: “For the Nationalist League all foreigners ... are friends and collaborators; unless they show us, by their deeds or words, that they want the contrary”’.²¹ Consulting the actual citation, one finds that it is a statement denouncing *jacobinismo*, a term which in the Brazilian context refers specifically to anti-Portuguese sentiment.²² Further research reveals that the LN’s statement was written in response to alleged insults to Brazilian womanhood published in a Porto newspaper, and sought to avert an anti-Portuguese backlash on the part of *paulistanos*.²³ The implied connection to Italian immigrants and their Brazilian-born children thus disappears. The League’s supposed antigovernment stance is also called into question when one notes that this manifesto was placed in the legislative record by PRP state deputy Luís Piza Sobrinho.²⁴

Political conflict in the paulista interior

The central player in the ethno-economic explanation is ‘Big Coffee’, with its economic roots in the state’s predominantly rural counties, far from the would-be nationalists and effete intellectuals of the state capital. In seeking to demonstrate the existence of ‘Big Coffee’ reaction in the interior, Font discusses politics in Araras, Atibaia, Barretos, Ourinhos, Palmital, Pirajuí, Taquaritinga and Tatuí, while Welch hazards a brief discussion that would more or less cover the entire upper Mogiana region (which in his estimation includes the *baixa-paulista*-zone county of Barretos).²⁵ Reviewing Font’s comments on political conflict in these predominantly rural counties in the light of archival research and the newspaper items cited in *Coffee, Contention, and Change*, it becomes clear not only that these cases fail to confirm the hypothesis of nativist, anti-industrial planter discontent fuelling local

²¹ Font, *Coffee, Contention, and Change*, p. 298 (the ellipsis is Font’s). The final reference to the Nationalist League is a retrospective aside on p. 306.

²² A fuller transcription of the manifesto makes this clear: ‘The nationalism of the Nationalist League of S. Paulo is, extremely, nationalism, but, with [our] fervent pledge, nothing more than this: – one does not find in it a single speck of JACOBINISMO. For the Nationalist League every foreigner, and especially the Portuguese, is a friend and collaborator until [he] makes us see, by his actions or words, that he prefers to be otherwise. It is injustice, always clamorous and sometimes cruel, to hold a collectivity responsible for individual errors and outrages, and it appears to us very difficult, if not impossible, that Brazil exhibit the greatness of our dreams, without the cooperation of the sons of other nations.’ *O Estado de S. Paulo*, 1 July 1921, p. 3 (original emphasis).

²³ Liga Nacionalista, ‘Relatorio apresentado na sessão de 6 de março de 1922’, *O Estado de S. Paulo*, 14 March 1922, p. 8.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ For a differing interpretation of politics in the upper Mogiana, see my ‘Coronelismo in Theory and Practice: Evidence, Analysis, and Argument from São Paulo,’ *Luso-Brazilian Review* (forthcoming).

opposition to the state government and culminating in the formation of the Democratic Party, but that Font's accounts of local politics often do not match up with what actually occurred. In most of these cases, what one actually finds are typical local oppositions, loyal to statewide powerholders and organised along familiar clientelistic and personalistic lines.

In Araras, Font's most important case study, 'Martinho da Silva Prado – son [sic] of the Baron of Iguape (founder [sic] of the Silva Prado family clan) ... played a major role in the early development of the county'. Thereafter, '[t]ogether with other traditional elites, including the Baron of Arari and the Coimbra family, the Prados had helped rule in genteel patriarchalism' up to an unspecified point when 'a previous political balance' was altered and '[r]elative outsiders or newcomers' Mário Tavares and Narciso Gomes came to power as 'members of the now dominant group tied to PRP party chief Antônio Lacerda Franco'. Faced with this apparent loss of power, the county's traditional coffee planters 'mobilized to form the Partido Municipalista Ararense'. In 1919 the PMA lost to the Lacerda Franco-linked faction in municipal elections, but intensified its attacks on the new powerholders during the period that followed. The struggle turned violent in February 1920, when carnivalesque ridicule escalated into gunplay between *perrepistas* and *municipalistas*. Later in the decade, Font reports, Araras party boss Lacerda Franco, then president of the PRP Executive Committee, made the mistake of opposing Júlio Prestes de Albuquerque's selection as state presidential candidate, an error that led to 'the *coup de grâce* for old chief Lacerda Franco, who therefore lost total ground to Prestes'.²⁶

This account of local politics in the important test-case county of Araras is not only inaccurate at various points, it is misleading in its implications. A perusal of the citations found in *Coffee, Contention, and Change* alongside a handful of other sources makes this clear.

In the first place, the Martinho da Silva Prado to whom Font first refers was neither the son of the Baron of Iguape, nor was the Baron himself, the third of four prominent Prados to bear given name 'Antônio', the founder of the 'Silva Prado family clan'. This Martinho da Silva Prado (1811–1891) was the nephew and son-in-law of the Baron of Iguape. It appears almost certain that the Martinho da Silva Prado credited with co-founding the PMA was the third son of the second Martinho Prado (Martinho da Silva Prado Júnior, 1843–1906) identified by family historian Darrell Levi as 'Martinho Prado Neto (b. 1881)'. This Martinho Prado was

²⁶ See Font, *Coffee, Contention, and Change*, pp. 149, 149n–50n, 152–3, 163, 169–70, 187 n2, 196–7.

a pioneer in the development of *paulista* citriculture and the commercialisation of citrus fruit.²⁷

Turning to *ararense* politics, one finds a situation far different than that outlined above. While most of the PMA's leading lights were heavily invested in coffee, collectively they were far from being the traditional monocultural planters described by Font, as the presumed example of Martinho da Silva Prado Neto suggests; one leader in particular, likely of recent immigrant stock, was described as a 'great industrialist'.²⁸

Given the importance of Araras to Font's argument, one would expect to see local planters flocking to the banner of the 'Big Coffee' PD, but this was not the case. In fact, it proved impossible for the PD, through 1930, to create a lasting local organisation in this important coffee county. One early PD leader was the planter Albino Alves Camargo, who had remained neutral during the struggle between the PMA and the local Republican leadership.²⁹ In February 1928 elections for the state legislature, the PD was only able to muster 181 voters in Araras, fewer than the probable number of adult male employees and dependents of a large-scale planter like Camargo. By mid-1928, the party claimed only one local 'coreligionist', the Italian-surnamed

²⁷ See Darrell E. Levi, *The Prados of São Paulo: An Elite Family and Social Change, 1840–1930* (Athens, Georgia, 1987), pp. 3–4, 50–1, 148, 216 n51, 241 n58, 241 n60; 'Martinho Prado', in Abreu et al. (eds.), *Dicionário histórico-biográfico brasileiro*, p. 4763.

²⁸ In early 1920 the Martinho Prado referred to by Font was not yet invested in citrus, at least not in Araras, but he was heavily invested in livestock and operated a 'grande fabrica de farinha de mandioca', in addition to his coffee holdings. The other members of the 'Partido Novo', as Font's 'contentious planter party' was then identified, exhibited similarly broad patterns of investment. Jorge Chaves owned three times as many coffee bushes as Prado, but was also invested in livestock and cotton. Silva Telles was invested in livestock, dairy, and the production of foodstuffs (notably butter and cured meat), as well as coffee. Armando de Castro was identified as the son of large planter; he owned 100,000 coffee bushes himself, but his professional title and his house in town suggest that he may have identified primarily as an urban-based liberal professional of some sort – a lawyer, one guesses. Mário Soares was the manager and co-owner of two estates that produced coffee, cotton, and livestock; his brother João Lacerda Soares was identified as an industrialist and as the founder of a local dairy concern. Ferdinando and Luiz Delmain (presumably brothers) were large coffee planters but were also engaged in the commercial production of manioc flour, sugar, and cane liquor. Joaquim Franco de Camargo grew coffee and cane. Firmo Vergueiro was the co-owner of a large coffee plantation; he was also identified by a professional title and a house in town. Cesário Coimbra was a large planter with holdings in coffee, cotton, and livestock. Another member, Lucas Batistela, owned two 'large plantations' and was identified as a 'great industrialist'. See 'Política de Araras' (unsigned seção livre article), *O Estado de S. Paulo*, 8 Jan. 1920, p. 8. This item is cited by Font as part of the 'basic documentation' of 'Big Coffee' reaction. See Font, *Coffee, Contention, and Change*, p. 150n.

²⁹ See 'Política de Araras' (unsigned seção livre article), *O Estado de S. Paulo*, 28 April 1920, p. 7; Nogueira Filho, *Ideais e lutas*, p. 656; José Claudio Barriguelli (ed.), *O pensamento político da classe dominante paulista, 1873–1928* (São Carlos, 1986), p. 109.

Sílvio Baggio, probably a member of the same family that, as ‘Baggio & Irmãos’, was listed among the county’s ‘principal producers’ in 1933.³⁰

Font’s final reference to *ararense* politics is in his account of local boss Lacerda Franco’s eventual defeat. Font raises this matter in the context of local politics in the port city of Santos, but the case of Lacerda Franco is illustrative of *paulista* politics more broadly, and not in a manner consonant with the ‘Big Coffee’ thesis. That as important a political figure as Lacerda Franco, whom Font identifies with banking and coffee trading, and whom Warren Dean informs us was ‘a shareholder in Paulista cotton mills’, was eased out of power for opposing the candidacy of Júlio Prestes, who in 1927 bragged ‘I am not part of any commercial society, I do not own stock in corporations [*sociedades anônomas*], I am not a businessman, not a banker and not a capitalist’, strongly suggests that personalism and clientelism trumped industrialisation and diversification when it came to representation in the PRP.³¹

Font devotes relatively less attention to the individual counties of Atibaia, Barretos, Ourinhos, Palmital, Pirajuí, Taquaritinga and Tatuí. In each of these cases, however, the ethno-economic explanation for political conflict comes up short. In Barretos, for example, one finds that the supposedly nativist ‘Big Coffee’ reaction against the state government counted on the support of Italian-, Central European-, and Syrian-Lebanese-surnamed industrialists, merchants, pastoralists and agriculturalists, while in Tatuí, where in the early 1920s ‘smallholders emerged as a new socio-political force, and led by Coronel Tomás Guedes (member of a family involved in factories), founded a new political party’, the hardscrabble, enterprising *guedistas* went on support the PD.³²

The Democratic Party of São Paulo

The PD is central to the thesis of anti-immigrant, anti-industry, coffee-planter discontent fuelling political opposition and leading eventually to the

³⁰ ‘Araras’, AIHGSP, Arquivo Partido Democrático (hereafter APD), pacote 9; São Paulo, Secretaria da Agricultura, Indústria e Commercio, *Os municípios do estado de São Paulo* (São Paulo, 1933), p. 27.

³¹ Font, *Coffee, Contention, and Change*, p. 187 n3; Dean, *Industrialization of São Paulo*, p. 143. Júlio Prestes is quoted in Célio Debes, *Júlio Prestes e a primeira república* (São Paulo, 1982), p. 71; Debes adds: ‘He was, and would always be, a planter and a lawyer.’

³² ‘Manifesto do Partido Popular ao povo de Barretos’, in secção livre, *O Estado de S. Paulo*, 15 Mar. 1924, p. 9; Thomaz Guedes Pinto de Mello to Directores do Partido Democrático, Tatuhy, 28 Mar. 1926, AIHGSP, APD, pacote 34; idem to Membros do Directorio Provisorio do Partido Democrático, Tatuhy, 30 Aug. 1926, AIHGSP, APD, pacote 34; ‘Congresso do Partido Democrático,’ *O Combate*, 27 Dec. 1926, p. 4; propaganda leaflet, ‘Ao eleitorado de Tatuhy’, 23 Feb. 1927, AIHGSP, APD, album V; José Menezes da Silva to Prudente de Moraes Neto, Tatuí, 6 Feb. 1934, AIHGSP, APD, pacote 8. The quote is from Font, *Coffee, Contention, and Change*, p. 155 n.

‘Revolution of 1930’. Indeed, it has been probably the most influential of the hypotheses laid down in *Coffee, Contention, and Change*, finding its way into monographs and even a general history of Brazil.³³ But, as we have just seen, the overlap between the cases of local conflict cited by Font and the pro-PD mobilisation of the late 1920s was negligible or, as with the case of Tomás Guedes of Tatuí, calls into question the larger thesis of ‘Big Coffee’ reaction. But *Coffee, Contention, and Change* also deals with the state-level leadership of the PD, putting forward the argument that a ‘ cursory overview ’ of the party’s ‘claims and issues’ from March 1926 through February 1927 ‘suffices to establish the high degree of correspondence between’ party demands (its ‘claims and issues’) and those of ‘Big Coffee’: ‘The restoration of power to traditional *paulista* elites and the overthrow of the “oligarchy” was central. The party’s campaigns emphasized such issues previously articulated by Big Coffee elites as municipal rights, the overthrow of the “usurping oligarchy,” and related electoral and regime reforms.’³⁴ Here, as elsewhere, the ethno-economic explanation relies on an a priori understanding of the issues at stake, as the latter sentence only holds true if one accepts as accurate the preceding portrayals of the Nationalist League, county-level politicking, and various other conflicts as stemming from ‘Big Coffee’ reaction.

As this undue reliance on unestablished wisdom suggests, the pool of evidence for *Coffee, Contention, and Change*’s discussion of the PD’s ‘claims and issues’ is shallow. It consists of five speeches, all of which were published in *O Estado de S. Paulo*.³⁵

Taking these in order of their publication, the first is Waldemar Ferreira’s speech at the investiture of the PD’s provisional commission in the booming town of Jaú, cited by Font as evidence ‘that there were unmistakable signs that the party blamed immigrants for much of the problems they faced’.³⁶ The offending lines indeed appear in Ferreira’s speech, but they are taken completely out of context. First of all, it is the sole passage in the speech (which deals almost wholly with matters political) that might be construed as nativist, if one excepts Ferreira’s quasi-Orientalist reference to political disengagement as ‘Muslim indifference’.³⁷ Second, the lines in question were

³³ See notes 5–6 above; also Verena Stolcke, ‘Coffee Planters, Politics, and Development in Brazil,’ *Latin American Research Review*, vol. 24, no. 3 (1989), p. 139.

³⁴ Font, *Coffee, Contention, and Change*, p. 183.

³⁵ See Font, *Coffee, Contention, and Change*, pp. 183–4, 190 (notes 78 through 83). Font also alludes to the unspecified ‘activities’ of ‘party activist’ Raul Cardoso de Mello, citing *O Estado de S. Paulo*, 6 Aug. 1926, p. 6 (Font, *Coffee, Contention, and Change*, p. 190 n79), but no mention of Cardoso de Mello is to be found in the cited issue.

³⁶ Font, *Coffee, Contention, and Change*, p. 184.

³⁷ Ferreira spoke on the lack of discrete political parties since the Empire, the ‘politics of the governors’, the pursuit of politics for financial ends, political disengagement, clientelistic local politics, the civic obligations of Brazilians and *paulistas*, and the PD’s goals. He did not

preceded by a reference to Brazil being ‘antagonized abroad, as it was just days ago in Geneva’, with the failure of its bid for a permanent seat on the Council of the League of Nations. This reference, as with the reference to hyphenated Brazilians cited by Font, was patriotic rhetoric designed to impress an audience composed mostly of newspaper-reading, flag-waving, and anthem-singing upstanding citizens, many of them with their families in tow.³⁸ If we take the lines quoted by Font seriously as evidence of PD nativism, we should also argue on the basis of the lines immediately preceding them that the notoriously Europhile leaders of the PD were ‘unmistakably’ anti-European as well.

The second source is a speech given by José Adriano Marrey Júnior at the investiture of the PD’s municipal commission in São Manoel, cited to prove that the party condemned the PRP for its ‘despotism’.³⁹ Marrey Júnior did indeed condemn PRP rule, and like Ferreira he did so in a speech that was almost wholly political in content and that contained no substantive references to immigration, coffee or industry.⁴⁰

The third speech is cited in a rather awkward context: ‘PD’s candidate [sic] Luis [sic] de Queiroz Aranha focused his campaign on demanding tax reduction for planters’. The relevant endnote explains: ‘See, for example, Luís de Queiroz Aranha’s speech in Franca’, published in *O Estado de S. Paulo*, 23 July 1926.⁴¹ This speech was delivered four months before Aranha was made a PD candidate for higher office, at which time he ran in the Paraíba Valley region, an area far from Franca and entirely outside of the Santos coffee zone. Examining the speech itself, one finds that Aranha did indeed call for the reduction of taxes on coffee, an unsurprising development given he was addressing a crowd in a coffee-dependent county. Aranha was answered by the local PD commission’s official speaker, who reciprocated, giving Aranha and the other big-city delegates what he thought they would want to hear: applause for the PD and its ideals, references to the current ‘political convulsions’ and the growing ‘public spirit’ of Brazil’s ‘essentially constitutional’ people (an odd and perhaps inadvertent play on the old saw that Brazil was an ‘essentially agricultural’ nation), a call for government of the people by the people, and a salute to a fallen patriot much beloved in *paulistano* intellectual circles, the poet Olavo Bilac. Other speeches by the

discuss immigration policy, or coffee, or industry, in the last case save for the obligatory reference to the PD platform, which called for greater influence in public life for agriculturalists, merchants, and industrialists. See ‘Partido Democrático’, *O Estado de S. Paulo*, 27 April 1926, p. 6.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Font, *Coffee, Contention, and Change*, p. 190 n178.

⁴⁰ ‘Partido Democrático’, *O Estado de S. Paulo*, 28 April 1926, p. 6.

⁴¹ Font, *Coffee, Contention, and Change*, pp. 184, 190 n80.

visiting delegates discussed issues near and dear to the hearts of local men, most of all coffee, but also including the enchanting ‘mulher francana’.⁴²

The fifth source is ‘a major speech in the key city of Santos’, in which ‘candidate [sic] Reinaldo Porchat reiterated the demand for a complete reform of the [Coffee] Institute to give effective control to planters and *comissários*’.⁴³ In this case, not only were PD candidates for the upcoming February elections not to be chosen for more than three months, but Porchat did not go on to stand for public office in those elections or any others held during this period. And, though Porchat did criticise the operation of the Coffee Institute in his speech, he devoted far more attention to constitutional issues – to political and administrative ideas – as befitted a legal scholar of his standing.⁴⁴

The final speech cited as evidence of ‘Big Coffee’ reaction is one Paulo de Moraes Barros delivered in Ribeirão Preto in early February 1927. It was a classic pro-planter speech given by the quintessential PD agrarian to an audience in the most important city in the upper Mogiana region, a prime site for large-scale coffee production. In his speech, Moraes Barros played to the crowd, opening with a reference to the ‘essentially agricultural district’ in which he was running and adding, ‘I consider myself not only the candidate of my party, but also of agriculturalists, a class to which I am proud to belong.’ Over the course of his speech Moraes Barros called for technical training in agriculture-related fields, for renewed immigration, for credit to be extended to farmers and stockmen, for more efficient rail transport (with special mention of the increased transport of non-coffee agricultural products destined for domestic consumption), for publicity abroad to promote increased coffee consumption, and for lower tax rates. With this platform, he presented himself to the voters of the third federal electoral district, ‘confident that Democratic coreligionists as well as agriculturalist coreligionists’ would vote for ‘their legitimate representative’. He closed his speech – which contained no nativist or anti-industrial references – with the call: ‘All for Democracy and for Agriculture!’⁴⁵

As impressively as Moraes Barros’ speech reads today, apparently his touching confidence in the *lavoura* was misplaced and his appeals for planter mobilisation went unheeded. The large planters of Ribeirão Preto and its

⁴² In the account of the festivities published in *O Estado de S. Paulo*, there is a list of these ‘senhoritas e senhoras da alta sociedade francana’ who applauded the PD delegates; of these thirty-four women, seven bore recognisably Italian surnames, interesting if indirect and anecdotal evidence against lending too much credence to the existence of serious ethno-economic divisions rending *paulista* society. See ‘Partido Democratico’, *O Estado de S. Paulo*, 23 July 1926, p. 6. ⁴³ Font, *Coffee, Contention, and Change*, p. 190 n79.

⁴⁴ ‘Partido Democratico’, *O Estado de S. Paulo*, 1 Sept. 1926, p. 4.

⁴⁵ ‘Manifesto do Dr. Paulo de Moraes Barros, candidato do Partido Democratico a deputado federal,’ *Folha do Partido Democratico*, published in *O Estado de S. Paulo*, 10 Feb. 1927, p. 7.

environs did not come out to polling places on 24 February 1927 with their vast clienteles gathered behind them, eager to support the insurgent party. Instead, as local PD leaders reported, ‘the best voter, ... the one with the most ardent and enlightened civic consciousness, the most independent and courageous one, is not, as is generally supposed, the presumed voter of high standing, the capitalist, the planter, the law student, etc., but the worker, the commercial employee, the tailors, cobblers, dentists, pharmacists, doctors, in sum all those who live from their day-to-day work’.⁴⁶

This kind of middle-class support, particularly when combined with coffee-planter indifference, is difficult to reconcile with the thesis of ‘Big Coffee’ reaction driving the PD’s campaigns, but an attempt has nevertheless been made: ‘Hundreds of new liberal professionals were attempting to pursue autonomous careers related to politics. These included ... Moacir Piza’, who in fact had killed himself in October 1923, nearly two and a half years before the founding of the PD. ‘It seems very plausible that these traditional middle sectors came together out of not only a hatred for the “decadent,” “oligarchic,” “arrogant and arbitrary,” “usurping” politicians of the PRP, but also out of a common reaction to the emergent economic and political challenges posed by immigrants, including merchants and industrialists.’⁴⁷

This attempt to gloss over authentic middle-class support in order to bolster the thesis of nativist ‘Big Coffee’ reaction is misleading. In the first place, many of the men placed among the ‘traditional middle sectors’, especially law professors, many law students, and higher-status practicing lawyers, were considered and should still be considered to have been part of the *paulista* upper class. Second, it is unclear how ‘traditional’ the liberal professions were in a society in which local professional education in engineering, medicine, pharmaceuticals, and dentistry were relatively novel and even formal legal training had only existed since 1828. Third, the passage in question makes the implicit assumption that ‘middle sectors’ and ‘immigrants’ were mutually exclusive categories. Finally, the ‘traditional middle sectors’ thesis rests on ignoring participation in the PD by ‘non-traditional middle sectors’, including commercial employees, clerks, bank tellers, and other solidly middle-class types, who supported the PD in much greater numbers than did liberal professionals.

The ethno-economic explanation also asks that one overlook support for the PD from outside of the coffee zone. An apt illustration is the support given the party in Capão Bonito, a staple-producing county south of the

⁴⁶ J. F. Salles Pupo, et al., ‘As eleições de 24 de Fevereiro em Ribeirão Preto,’ 14 March 1927, AIHGSP, APD, pacote 15.

⁴⁷ Font, *Coffee, Contention, and Change*, p. 182; Duarte, *Memórias*, vol. 9, pp. 299–323.

Santos coffee zone, where pharmacist and ‘excellent element’ João Venturelli led what was acknowledged to be ‘[t]he best directorate in the 4th district’.⁴⁸ In the industrialising suburb of São Bernardo, the party’s central leadership recognised a ‘[g]ood directorate’ made up entirely of Italian-surnamed men.⁴⁹ Perhaps most tellingly, the greatest stronghold of the PD was the ever-growing state capital, as even *perrepistas* acknowledged.⁵⁰

Even within the coffee zone, as the case of Ribeirão Preto indicates, the party often drew more support from urban-based groups than from agriculturalists of any size, crop type, or national origin. Casa Branca, nearly three hundred kilometres north of the state capital on the Mogiana line, offers a further example of this general tendency. In this moderately prosperous county, a mostly middle-class Democratic League (nearly half of the members of which bore non-Portuguese surnames) formed the basis for the PD’s local organisation.⁵¹

More broadly, and perhaps most importantly, the ethno-economic explanation overstates the importance of the PD through to 1930. The Democratic Party was a minority party and remained one throughout this period, as the usually supportive *O Estado de S. Paulo* admitted.⁵² It was able to make some advances, particularly among the respectable, newspaper-reading folk of more urban areas, but never established successful affiliates in scores of counties across the state, including key coffee counties. If it had truly been the party of ‘Big Coffee’, this would not have been the case.⁵³

Conclusion

For all the failings of *Coffee, Contention, and Change* and likeminded works, the ethno-economic explanation is laudable in one important respect. It represents an attempt at understanding the interplay between politics, society, and the state during a crucial period in the history of Brazil’s most important provincial unit. Indeed, some of Font’s most basic conclusions can even be

⁴⁸ ‘Capão Bonito’, AIHGSP, APD, pacote 8; João Venturelli to Marrey Junior, Capão Bonito, 22 Nov. 1926, AIHGSP, APD, pacote 33; João Venturelli and Josue de Paula Araujo to Directorio Central, Capão Bonito, 28 March 1929, AIHGSP, APD, pacote 5; Nogueira Filho, *Ideais e lutas*, p. 653; Barriguelli, *O pensamento político*, p. 107. On Capão Bonito more generally, see São Paulo, Secretaria da Agricultura, Commercio e Obras Publicas, *Os municípios do estado de S. Paulo* (São Paulo, 1924), pp. 69–70.

⁴⁹ ‘São Bernardo’, AIHGSP, APD, pacote 8.

⁵⁰ Percival de Oliveira, *O ponto de vista do P. R. P.* (São Paulo, 1930), p. 17.

⁵¹ See ‘Liga Democratica de Casa Branca,’ *O Estado de S. Paulo*, 8 July 1925, p. 6; ‘Em Casa Branca,’ *O Combate*, 10 July 1925, p. 2; Francisco Oliva to Directores do PD, Casa Branca, 14 April 1926, AIHGSP, APD, pacote 33. Cf. Font, *Coffee, Contention, and Change*, pp. 178, 189 n67. ⁵² ‘Notas e informações,’ *O Estado de S. Paulo*, 16 Sept. 1930, p. 3.

⁵³ Steven Topik has also made this last point; see his review of *Coffee, Contention, and Change* in the *Journal of Economic History*, vol. 51, no. 4 (Dec. 1991), p. 986.

seconded. I would be among the first to agree that ‘the terms characterizing São Paulo after World War I were diversifications and heterogenization, competition, and change’. Likewise, Font is correct to argue that local politics were more complex than some accounts would lead one to believe.⁵⁴

In the end, however, the ethno-economic explanation formulated by Font and adopted by Welch and others is profoundly unsatisfactory. In finding instances of snobbishness and opportunism at the margins of politics and choosing to see broad patterns of class conflict and ethnic rivalry, and in perceiving crises then electing to conceive conspiracy, it diminishes our sense of the past, for the bases of political conflict in São Paulo in the 1920s (and the 1910s and much of the 1930s, for that matter) were clientelistic, personalistic, and sometimes even ideological (in the latter case, especially in certain areas and among certain groups). At the local level, in particular, politics often revolved around the control of administrative posts and obtaining material advantages for individuals, families, factions, or the community as a whole. Even moral advantages were at stake, in particular that most intangible vital asset, ‘prestige’ (*prestígio*). To reach these conclusions is not to reify a vision of the *paulista* polity as ‘impervious’ to change.⁵⁵ Rather, these conclusions underscore our need for a broad reinterpretation of *paulista* politics, one that makes room for material, moral, ideological and emotive explanations for political conflict, and its absence, during this critical period in Brazilian history.

⁵⁴ The quote is from *Coffee, Contention, and Change*, p. 125.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*