

BOOK REVIEW

A imprensa e o dever da verdade

RUY BABORSA

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REVIEWED BY **JOSÉ MARQUES DE MELO**

There are works which are predestined from birth to create a lasting impact on society, due to the author's credibility, to the current nature of the theme or to the timeliness of the publication.

There is a title in Brazilian journalism literature that completely satisfies these three requirements. It is Rui Barbosa's book – *A imprensa e o dever da verdade* (The press and the duty of truth) – once again in circulation in the book market .

This was one of the reasons to include it in the Collection "Brazilian Journalism Classics" which I organized to commemorate the 180 years of the press in Brazil, published by the University of São Paulo Publishing Company, but which rapidly went out of print. As a matter of fact, this work should have appeared in 1988, the year in which the landmark mentioned above took place, being the oldest of the chronological series. But, on reviewing the list of titles, I realized that the only living author among those selected was Barbosa Lima Sobrinho. This explains the fact that *O Problema da imprensa* (The problem of the press) dated 1923 headed the sequence. Its author lent prestige to the launching, in a historic ceremony held in the Camargo Guarnieri Auditorium on the campus of the University of São Paulo. The collection was immediately continued by Rui Barbosa's book (1990) and by other classics: *Jornalismo como gênero literário* (Journalism as a literary genre, by Alceu de Amoroso Lima, 1990), *A missão da Imprensa* (The mission of the Press, by Carlos Lacerda, 1990), *Iniciação à Filosofia do Jornalismo* (Initiation to the Philosophy of Journalism, by Luiz Beltrão, 1992) and *O Espírito do Jornalismo* (The Spirit of Journalism, by Danton Jobim, 1992).

The work is divided into three well-defined parts. In the first part, the author talks about the genre of which he made use, much

in vogue during a period in which the press, subsidized by the government, banned public debate from its pages. In the second part, he contextualizes the venality of newspapers and journalists in Brazil, seduced by the politicians who controlled the public funds and unscrupulously made use of them to perpetuate themselves in power. In the third part, he broadened the diagnosis, showing that this distortion had respectable precedents in other countries, being equally condemnable, here and elsewhere.

A imprensa e o dever da verdade was written by one of the most prestigious Brazilian intellectuals at the height of his career as a public figure, after having led the antimilitaristic campaign which made him famous as a defender of justice and honesty. Minister of Finance in the first republican government, Rui Barbosa was active concurrently in three areas: law, politics and the press. He lived abroad, as an exile and as a diplomat, being therefore very familiar with the political institutions of his time. A defender of liberalism, he applied its principles to our primitive republican Constitution. He fought militarism bitterly, converting this flag into an electoral platform which was received enthusiastically by public opinion during the four campaigns in which he was a contender for the Presidency of the Republic. Despite being acclaimed by crowds in the streets throughout the country, he was successively defeated by his adversaries in fraudulent contests manipulated by the government machine.

The work focuses on a sensational issue of that time – corruption in the press. Repeatedly denied by the spokesmen for the executive branch, this abominable practice debased Brazilian political life. Constituting the Achilles heel of the so-called Old Republic, the existence of “secret funds” which bought the journalists’ conscience and sealed the newspaper owners’ complicity was publicly confirmed by former president Campos Salles in his book of memoirs *Da Propaganda à Presidência* (From Propaganda to the Presidency).

Indictments such as that of Rui Barbosa fed the flame of national indignation, leading to the 1930 Revolution, which removed from power the agrarian-exporter oligarchy. Nevertheless, the author avoided the sentiment of national self-commiseration, documenting the occurrence of similar deviations in imperial countries such as Bismarck’s Germany and the United States of Lincoln. The anchoring in authorized sources shows familiarity with the journalistic bibliography of his time.

The first edition circulated in 1920 in order to raise funds for the Shelter for the Children of the People of Salvador. Reproducing the author's manuscript which due to his physical weakness he was unable to correct, this original edition contained several errors of revision. Because of this, an erratum was inserted in the second edition, which was supposedly printed at the expense of the newspaper "A Tarde" to commemorate the visit by its editor-in-chief, Armando de Campos, to the Shelter for the Children of the People (1924), right after the author's death.

The work circulated again in 1949, at the initiative of Heitor Dias, director of the Official Press of the State of Bahia, included in the volume entitled *Lições de Rui* (Rui's Lessons). It reappeared in 1970 in an edition of the Editora Organização Simões, until it resurged in 1990 in the catalog of the University of São Paulo Publishing Company in a carefully made edition prepared by the trainees of the Publishing Company laboratory COMARTE, under the competent supervision of Prof. Plínio Martins.

This emblematic edition acquired more density with the preface written by Prof. Dr. José Freitas Nobre who lauded the double purpose of that conference, baring Rui Barbosa's "political reactions to the errors and vices of society, to nepotism, to corruption, to the arbitrary nature of the ruling class and at the same time, the convocation of young people for the Nation's moral recovery".

Its reappearance in the current singular situation of Brazilian life is more than timely. As jurist Manuel Alceu Affonso Ferreira says in a new preface:

No longer are just publicity funds distributed openly, nor are they the main ones. The substitution was arranged by state loans paid off with political support, by tax violation amnesties which pay for laudatory news, by incentives concentrating journalistic activity in monopolistic groups; in short, by the thousand and one tricks of which the ingenuity of that efficient partnership between some bad journalists and political agents is capable.

In times of monthly bribes to convince congressmen, large-scale bribery operations, illegal slush funds, political parties renting their support, political party switching, apocryphal dossiers, violation of banking confidentiality, cover-up operations, as well as other sins of

the trade union republic and of its neo-oligarchic kindred entities, Rui Barbosa's legacy is revealed as extremely up-to-date.

It is never too much to remind young people who are making their debut on the journalistic front in this XXI century, of the "duty of truth" contained in the blazing words of that legendary journalist of the XX century:

Power is not a cavern, it is a stage. Authority is not a cloak, but a beacon. Politics is not a Masonic ritual, it is a field of combat. Whether they want it or not, for those who devote themselves to public life, even their private life has walls of glass...For the Nation, there are no secrets...

José Marques de Melo. Professor Emeritus of the University of São Paulo and Titular Director of the Unesco/Methodist Chair of Communication.