

Undercover agent tells of new adventures as Christian militant

THE FALCON THAT FLIES LIKE AN EAGLE

Guerrilla warfare persists today in Latin America as in other parts of the world. Ché Guevara's struggle in Bolivia, the Tupamaros in Uruguay and the current wave of terrorism in Argentina have captured the headlines. From Brazil comes this story of a guerrilla fighter, Antonio Falcão, interviewed by Reginald Holme.

ARMED GUERRILLAS lurked in the forests and hills that rise from the narrow coastal strip of North East Brazil. This North East region, the size of France and Germany together, was described by US President John Kennedy as 'the most critical area of the Western Hemisphere'.

It is often parched with drought or, as recently, devastated with floods. Poverty for decades pinched the lives of its people and led to marches on the State Capital by thousands of members of the militant Peasant Leagues. Troops had to be called in. Tanks were in the streets. Peasant League leaders were murdered. Students rioted and locked the university faculty out.

Warships have had to be called in to the harbour of Recife to keep watch and prevent violence in this port city, where revolutionary portworkers were ready to sink a ship to block US aid



Antonio Falcão

entering Brazil. In this North East live one third of Brazil's people.

Such was the turbulent and toughening scene in which Antonio Falcão, Recife portworker, grew up to become Secretary of one of the cells responsible for training the Peasant Leagues into a militant force to smash the government. The Leagues, organised Castro-style, claimed 40,000 members in 98 communities.

When he visited Switzerland to take part in a Caux Assembly last year and a London tense during bombings, I asked Antonio Falcão (his name means 'falcon') how he became a Communist revolutionary.

His penetrating, discerning eyes are now clear with compassion but I could imagine the baleful glare of a bird of

prey in his gaze as he faced the hardships of his boyhood and youth, and fought the men he held responsible for the North East's misery.

Antonio Falcão was born 58 years ago in a very poor family. His father was a bricklayer of Portuguese origin. His mother was of mixed Indian and African blood. He himself is dark-skinned, a fact which even in fairly prejudice-free Brazil made him later feel shut out from the higher echelons of the country's leadership.

When Antonio was eight his father died. 'My mother had to support me and my other brother, who was always in poor health, by dress-making. Often we could not afford badly-needed medical treatment.

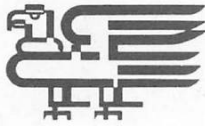
'My mother - the best mother in the world - was a believing Roman Catholic. She used to say: "You can lose everything, but don't lose faith in God".'

Still, it was a faith-testing moment for her one able-bodied son when she had to sell her one means of livelihood, her sewing machine, to buy food. 'I began to hate God, priests and the economic system,' says Antonio.

He got a job in a factory later and was able to give money to his mother. 'In the factory I noticed a young man observing me. He made himself my best friend and soon found out that I hated priests and God. He exploited my bitterness - and I found myself in the Communist Party.' He was to give 18 years of his life to the Party.

'How were you trained as a Communist?' I asked him. 'I trained myself a good deal,' he replied. 'I did a lot of reading, often till one in the morning. As a young Catholic I had been taught Saint Paul's advice in his First Letter to the Thessalonians (chapter 5, verse 21): "Do not despise prophetic utterances but test them all. Keep what is good in them and avoid the bad." I did just that - but with Karl Marx's writings!'

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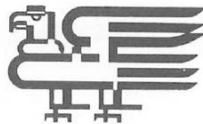
The Communist Party was illegal after 1947 but Antonio and his friends in Recife port learned to work underground as revolutionaries. 'We were shown a number of films made in Cuba and Moscow and dubbed into Portuguese. We listened to numerous radio broadcasts from Cuba and other Communist countries, beamed to Brazil and Latin America.'

During the years up to 1961, which was set as target date for the Peasant Leagues' uprising and revolution, Antonio was actively training Peasant League members in the ideology of class war which was always given priority.

But when the target day came up the Party got a surprise. It issued a call to take up arms for civil war but the Leagues refused. According to Antonio some of their leaders said: 'We have found a better ideology for changing society - without violence. Civil war in Brazil will only benefit the Big Powers - Russia and the United States. The ideology we need is called "Moral Re-Armament".'

the books published by Moral Re-Armament,' Antonio told me. 'I underlined all the parts which I thought would benefit the people I was fighting for. Next day I found I had underlined everything and had to face the fact that there was an ideology superior to Marxism. That is what decided me to work to spread the MRA ideology through the world.'

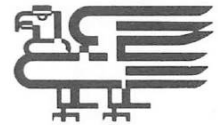
He also pays tribute to the influence of portworkers from Rio who showed their documentary film *Men of Brazil* at the conference. The film showed him how revolutionary Christianity, applied to port management and workers, cured corruption and replaced the dictatorship of bullet and rigged ballot with genuine democracy.



Antonio went into action with his fellow portworkers and began to be imbued with their same spirit. But first of all, he says, change like charity had to begin at home. His wife, Maria Rosa, a devout Catholic, had not known, it seems, about his undercover Communist activities, which he called for her benefit 'union meetings'. 'I was honest with her about

tancy. I also told the Director of the port that he could count on me to put the port on a good basis again.

'Of course I got many attacks, but as I had always been poor, and still continued as a poor man, it was obvious I was not getting dollars from anywhere.'



Antonio and his Rio fellow-revolutionaries were operating on terrain prepared by previous ideological action in the North East. Marshal Juarez Tavora, famed in Brazil as a revolutionary fighter and strategist for social justice, had set in motion a campaign for national awakening. He enlisted the help of students who had recently been rioting in their own cities in Latin America or Asia.

Students from Peru, where the Vice-President Nixon had been stoned on a university campus, had written a play *El Condor* dramatising their new radical approach for solving the social injustice in their countries. Vast crowds, including Peasant League leaders, saw these plays in the squares and market places of Recife and the North East. Some of these League leaders were convinced and welcomed Marshal Tavora and the student action.

In Recife itself Antonio and his colleague, Jarbas Leiros, who had been at the MRA conference, were at the core of a group of portworkers who had moved from militant Marxism to militant Christianity.

The Port Superintendent, Dr João Borba Jr, wrote in the Recife daily newspaper *Jornal do Comercio* about their new radicalism: 'It is a wonderful gift to the port. Workers who were considered hopeless cases, who did nothing to help the smooth running of the port, are today useful and enthusiastic men.'



One year after the change in Antonio and his friends the following points were reported. The Port Superintendent described them as 'fantastic results'.

- Chronic alcoholism had fallen by 50 per cent.
- Looting and pilfering were going out of fashion.
- Prices of staple foods in the Co-operative where most dockers' families shopped had been slashed by 30 per cent. According to the Dockers' Co-operative manager, this was due to absolute honesty becoming the policy of the firm.



'El Condor'—Peruvian students staged their play staged for thousands in North East Brazil.

Mao Tse-Tung was furious and branded the League leaders as 'opportunists'. The Communist Party of the North East sent two trusted men to an MRA world conference in Brazil in December 1961. One of them was Antonio Falcão, the other Jarbas Leiros, a tramway workers' union leader. The Party told these men to study the movement's methods and see how it could be undermined.

'I stayed up all night reading one of

these and other matters. I told her how I had graduated from my earlier training to be a trainer of others. And that my outward, paid jobs in the docks, which ranged from tally clerk and warehouseman to a variety of administrative posts, were just a cover for my ideological work.'

'I apologized to the Governor of Pernambuco State for the bitterness I had spread and the subversion I was part of, though I did not regret my honest mili-

- Wholesalers were offering credit for the first time.
- Liquor vanished from the Co-operative shelves. Asked whether he missed it, one docker replied: 'My health is good and I have more money. What's more, my family have more to eat.'
- The editor of the *Tribuna Portuaria* produced a special edition about the new revolution.
- The Captain of the Port Police said: 'My job is easier now.'
- The Marxist poet of the port wrote a play *The Blessings of God* which told the story of Antonio and three of his Communist colleagues in the port. Its première in Recife's reddest suburb was seen by hundreds of portworkers and peasants.
- Recife workers and Peruvian students presented films and plays over Recife Channel 2, one of Latin America's most powerful TV stations.

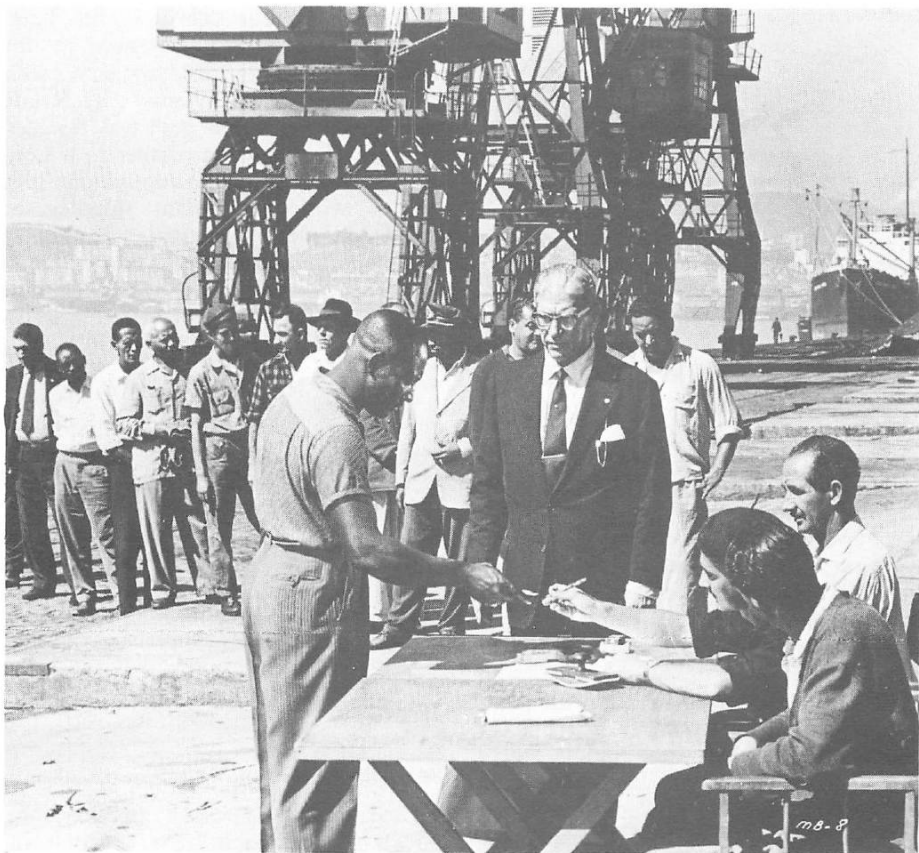
But Antonio and his friends saw this was no time to rest on their oars or sit with folded hands. Jarbas Leiros, 22 years a Communist, summed up their conclusions in 1962: 'If there hasn't been a violent revolution, it is because of this new spirit. God has intervened. This greater revolution certainly works. It must saturate the country in the next few months.' Otherwise, he was convinced, the country would fall prey to class-war revolution.



When President Quadros resigned after seven months in office, the North East slid into a state of chaos under President Goulart. During his presidency from 1961 to 1964 divisive forces set city dwellers against country dwellers, men in the armed forces against officers, while inflation ran at 100 per cent.

There was still plenty to be cleaned up after the first moves in Recife port. 'Under Goulart we had a Communist administration of the port. Its objective was to paralyse the port with strikes. So foreign ships went elsewhere. It was financially disastrous,' Antonio recalls. 'Some of us realised that if this went on for another five months we and the workers wouldn't get any more pay. There was also extreme administrative corruption. Every worker felt himself "master" of the goods stored in any warehouse. A proportion of thefts went to pay off the administrators for turning a blind eye.'

Trade unionists like Antonio Falcão and his colleagues decided to put down a further ideological barrage in the North East by using the film *The Crowning Experience*, a story of men and women who overcame race and class bitterness.



Rio—for the first time democratic elections in the port. A scene from the film 'Men of Brazil'.

One of the sponsors of it was Marshal Branco, the Governor of a military district. Antonio and his friends began to experience faith in action in ways that were not in the Marxist textbooks.

'We decided to take this film to Paraíba State, the stronghold of the Peasant Leagues of the North East,' says Antonio. This State is just north of Recife's State of Pernambuco. 'We dockers got together, put in all the money we had and raised enough to take a group of us to Paraíba's biggest city, Campina Grande. We had four cruzeiros left over—enough for a sandwich for one person. With that, we took off.'

Arriving in the city after a long bus journey, they visited the biggest cinema, which was to have a week's commercial showings of *The Crowning Experience*. 'We were so hungry that all we could think of was eating.' The four dockers had a time of quiet to get God's mind on how to proceed. The thought came, 'Go and book rooms in one of the biggest hotels.' They blenched but obeyed the thought and went into the dining room for a meal.

At a table across the room they noticed another group of men. They asked the waiter, 'Who are those men?' 'That's the Mayor and some of the councillors', he said. The dockers went over and introduced themselves. When the Mayor heard why they were in the city, he said: 'Moral Re-Armament? That's what we need here.' He called for the hotel manager and told him: 'These men are to be the guests of the city during their stay here.'

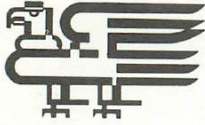


In 1964 there was a popular revolt against the growing inflation, corruption and anarchy. Catholic women helped to finally turn the tide of anarchy. In one city they organised a march of 500,000 'for God, family and country'. In São Paulo 800,000 marched. Goulart's government was toppled and government by military men, mostly of high calibre of character, took over with Marshal Castelo Branco as first of a succession of military Presidents.

'We got the government we needed, though not the one we wanted,' says Antonio. 'That is how some of my trade union friends and I would describe it. In Recife things changed. Many of those running the port were put in prison. Others fled or were deported. And here I would like to say what great respect I have for my Communist colleagues for their commitment and courage, even though I think now that their revolution does not go far enough or deep enough.'

'The Armed Forces sent a dynamic military man with a "flair for administration" to be Port Superintendent. He was extremely proud and vain at being a military man. He withdrew many gains we trade unionists had won. He thought we were all communists. With his bril-

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liant administrative gifts he created a great many more communists than there were before!

'How were we to get close enough to him to change these attitudes? He kept his eyes on the ground so he wouldn't need to meet anybody.

'A group of us who were trying to apply MRA got together to plan how to win this man and get his help for the port. We managed to meet him and were very sincere, direct and honest with him. We told him the effects his administration was having. We told him we fully understood his problems and would work with him if he would work with us. If he would clean up the port from the top down, we would clean from the bottom up and meet in the middle.

'We told him about the changes in the Port of Rio and how change in the lives of portworkers had changed the port. He saw *Men of Brazil*, the film about this, and had all the directors in to see it. The film was shown through the port and city of Recife.

'We rolled up our sleeves and started. It was very hard work but we got on with it. We found a deficit going back 20 years in the social services funds and in all the port funds. One year later the port had paid off all its debts and had one million cruzeiros (£71,000 approx) in the bank.

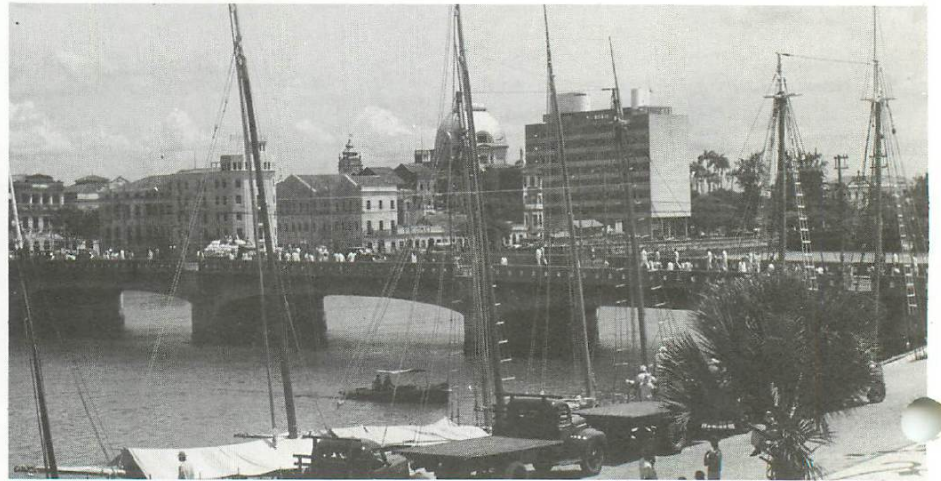
'Two of the country's largest papers wrote big articles about this "miracle" in the port of Recife. According to *O Globo* (20 March 1965) in an article headed "Total recovery in last 11 months" port income rose 100 per cent in that time.'

Pravda on 8 September 1972 reported that 'the Brazilian government has attracted two and a half billion dollars of private investment to North East Brazil through a system of tax incentives'. This had resulted, the official Soviet Central Committee organ said, during the past ten years in a six-fold increase in main roads, a twenty-fold increase in electricity consumption, and a rise in per capita income from 90 US dollars to 207.

'There is still plenty to be done', Antonio told me, 'But from experience so far I am convinced that all these problems can be solved if we let God direct us. One secret was that we didn't think of our own advantage but of the advantage to our country and the world.

If we roll up our sleeves in this fight, we can bring something new to the world.'

One ripple from the ports of Recife and Rio in the world pool was revealed by Frank Ledwith. As partner in a London insurance firm that insures one fifth of the world's merchant shipping he heard Antonio tell about the clean-up in Recife port. He said publicly at a meet-



Recife—at the time when Falcão was training men in the Peasant Leagues.

ing Antonio addressed in London: 'Much of the cargo from Brazil is insured in London. I think my firm paid for some of the cargo you stole. When many men stopped stealing in the Brazilian docks, the costs of insurance went down.' Antonio laughed, 'Now we are changed we are your greatest benefactors,' he said.



The falcon was to take eagles' wings and fly many times to Europe, where he met dockers and addressed meetings in ports such as Rotterdam, Genoa, London and other British ports. He was back in Uruguay at a recent conference in Montevideo (*New World News* 30 March). When he was there in 1972 the daily paper *El Dia* wrote: 'The experience of the dockers of Brazil who fight for Moral Re-Armament has brought enormous benefit to the economy of the country through changes in the ports of Recife and Rio de Janeiro, where corruption decreased and efficiency leapt up.'

In April this year Antonio Falcão attended an MRA Assembly in Pretoria, South Africa. His story made an impression at the Assembly and a Mozambique delegation, chiefly educationalists, invited him to come to their Portuguese-speaking country. This was just before

the critical take-over of government in Portugal by General Spínola.

Antonio, who had re-found the Catholic faith of his youth through MRA, was guest of the Rector of the Pius XII Seminary in Lourenço Marques. African seminarists followed each other in a steady stream into Antonio's room to talk over the contradictions in their lives with him honestly and listen to

Christ's thoughts for them (*New World News* 18 May).

Noticias, largest Mozambique daily newspaper, on 24 April ran a long interview with Antonio Falcão and an international labour-management group travelling with him. Antonio told of the changes in Recife port and their repercussions in Brazil through the application of absolute standards of ethics. These, according to Antonio in the interview, helped to 'eliminate corruption, subversion, demagoguery and incompetence and to end thieving, alcoholism, delinquency and laziness'. The paper's reporter was also interested in the different races taking part in the Pretoria Assembly.

Antonio Falcão, whose health has suffered from his struggles, has moved with his wife and five daughters and one son to Rio de Janeiro, a city of nearly five million people. He and fellow militants are organising a union of the street vendors, thousands of whom have till now lived an insecure and harassed existence earning a living with their little stalls on the city's pavements. They have had no voice with which to speak to the authorities, or the news media, and through them to their fellow citizens. 'Through this organisation of street vendors,' says Antonio, 'we are working to remove social injustice without hate or violence, and to show how such situations throughout the world can be solved.'

The falcon has flown a long way since he started, in the words of the prophet Isaiah, to 'mount up with wings like an eagle'.