

# Jango's labourism in pictures: the newsreels by Agência Nacional (1963-1964)

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## Abstract

The aim of this paper is to analyse the construction of the official image of João Goulart and his government based on the *Atualidades* newsreels produced by *Agência Nacional* (National Agency) between 1963-1964. It seeks to understand, through the state-owned audio-visual production, how Goulart requalified the labourism, reinforcing his political project of promoting social justice. The mobilization of several social sectors (labour movement, student movement, peasant leagues) favoured the radicalization of Goulart's labourism. The political newsreels produced in the years 1963 and 1964 deal with the main pillars of this "radical labourism": agrarian reform, independent foreign policy and the partnership between urban workers and the president of the Republic.

Keywords: Newsreels. Labourism. Public Images. Political Propaganda. Official Communication.

## Introduction

João Goulart's government (1961-1964) is one of the periods of greater political instability in Republican Brazil. Its aftermath was tragic: a civil-military coup that propelled the country in 21 years of military dictatorship. For decades, historiography focused its analysis on the understanding of the Goulart government from the episode that declared its end. Political turmoil, the economic crisis, the intense movement of social sectors, the cleavages inside the Armed Forces and the role of the press in the destabilization of government take up a significant part of historiographical research committed to understanding the "causes" of the coup (FICO, 2004; BADARÓ, 2008; DELGADO, 2010). Lately, new research has requalified the importance of Goulart's political trajectory and his performance at the head of the Presidency of the Republic, broadening the scope of investigations and highlighting the period from new analytical keys (FERREIRA, 2006; FERREIRA, 2011; FERREIRA; GOMES, 2014).

This article aligns itself with these new historiographical overviews. Our goal is to understand the development of an official public image of the Goulart government through the newsreels compiled by *Agência Nacional* (National Agency) from 1963 until March 1964. This image will be characterized by the status of João Goulart as a singled-out interlocutor with the working classes and his engagement to accomplish basic reforms, the main program of his government, through a strategy of requalification and expansion of labourism. As suggested by Gomes (2006), Goulart's political performance as the leader of PTB and as Labour Minister during the second Vargas Government (1953-1954) caused him to be the new labourism leader, even reorienting its political-ideological bases. Ferreira (2004) considers that this work endured a process of radicalization resulting from a historical period of heightened mobilization of the social sectors, both on the left and the right wings. In this sense, we begin with the concept of "radical labourism" developed by Ferreira (2004) in order to understand the formation of Goulart's public image by the National Agency newsreels.

The National Agency was created in 1945 in substitution of the *Departamento de Imprensa e Propaganda* (Department of Press and Propaganda – DIP), with the purpose of promoting official communication. Since the beginning of its activities, the Agency was responsible for the production and broadcasting of news through films, documentaries, newsreels, photographs and radio programs devoted to subjects considered of national interest. In 1979, the National Agency was substituted by *Empresa Brasileira de Notícias* (Brazilian News Enterprise) (CASTRO, 2013).

The official newsreels made by the National Agency consolidated the labourism ideology as an upholder of sustentation of the relations between the president and the urban and rural working classes. The presence of Goulart in events and meetings with the workers and their representatives will have a prominent place in the *Atualidades* news, published by the National Agency, always in a contentious tone, in favour of the workers and with the speech of prevailing over social inequalities. This public image elaborated by the Agency contested with other images about Goulart and his government. A part of the press, aligned with the more conservative groups, was antagonistic to the reform projects suggested by the leftists and was very critical of Goulart's performance at the head of the Presidency of the Republic, accusing him of communist inclinations (TOLEDO, 2004). In a time characterized by the intensification of anticommunism, intense social mobilization and political radicalization, the public image of a ruler is highly disputed by those who search for legitimacy for their actions (support or criticism) (ABREU, 2006).

Here, it is hypothesized that Goulart's official image broadcast by the newsreels shows a labourism that integrates into its agenda the fierce social mobilizations of the 1960s, especially from the agrarian reform, independent foreign policy and popular participation tripod. As Ferreira (2004) suggests, in constructing an official image connected to the basic reforms, Goulart cleared the possibilities of negotiation with conservative and opposition groups. On

the other hand, if he submitted to the demands of the opposition sectors, his image as a political defender of national interests, of workers and of autonomous economic development would be threatened. Therefore, Goulart opted for the radicalization of labourism (FERREIRA, 2004). To Gomes (2005), by choosing the maintenance of the image of a public man that serves the interests of the workers in line with the labourism ideology, he caused the distrust of the more conservative sectors to widen, favouring the pro-coup coalition.

For the formulation of the article, 19 issues of the newsreel *Atualidades* were used, relative to the year 1963 until March 1964, which are available on the Zappiens portal<sup>1</sup>. Out of this total, 15 refer to 1963. The duration of each issue varies from three to nine minutes. Six newsreels do not have any audio, showing only images. Only two newsreels, no.4 and no.30, do not make any mention of president João Goulart. In order to fulfil the objectives of the article, we are interested in the analysis of the news dedicated to Goulart or his government, the narratives, and images produced by the National Agency being considered in their entirety. Therefore, we have selected the news concerned only to the political universe and performed a combined analysis of narratives and images. We start from the proposal of Ramos (2008), who sought to track down a non-fictional production within the field of audio-visual research, highlighting the importance of understanding the documentary sources based on the specificity of their narrative, produced to elaborate statements about the social world that are valid and extensively recognized (RAMOS, 2008, p.57). Thus, this article has an interdisciplinary proposal, articulating the contributions of History and Cinema Theory in the production of its analysis. As an adopted methodology, we first carry out the transcriptions of the newsreels narratives; subsequently, we cluster the news by the themes associated with Goulart's labourism project: agrarian reform, urban and rural workers active participation; independent foreign policy; finally, we investigate the relation between narrative and image, noticing the scenic formation of the political meanings imparted by radical labourism.

## **Goulart's "radical labourism" in the images and narratives of the newsreel *Atualidades***

The historians devoted to Brazilian politics in the period of 1945 and 1964 stress Goulart's unique performance in building a new identity for the Brazilian Labourism Party (PTB) and for the labourism ideology itself since his role as Minister of Labour (GOMES, 2006; FERREIRA, 2006). The citizenship proposed in the labourism ideology was associated with the world of work, shaping, then, a "true social pact with the working classes" (GOMES, 2005, p.265 – Our translation). In the 1960s, the social movements had

<sup>1</sup> The Zappiens portal is dedicated to the dissemination of digital content, organized by the *Comitê Gestor da Internet no Brasil* (Brazilian Internet Steering Committee). Through an agreement with *Arquivo Nacional* (National Archive), it made available the films produced by the *Agência Nacional*. Available at: <<http://www.zappiens.br/portal/home.jsp>>. Accessed on: 19 feb. 2018.

strengthened themselves and started to pressure political leaderships for their social rights. The newsreels, however, build the image of the basic reforms as a project of Goulart's labourism, curtailing the mobilization of social movements in the acquisition of their rights.

The *Atualidades* newsreel in 1963 and the first months of 1964 highlight three great political images of the Goulart government: the president's popularity with the urban working class; the defence of an independent foreign policy; and, ultimately, the importance of basic reforms, mostly the agrarian reform, this one associated with the denouncement of the rural worker's misery situation and the accountability of the big properties for the penury of peasant families. We single out these three themes to analyse the building of Goulart's public image and his government by the newsreels, identifying them as the pillars of "radical labourism".

The formation of the image of a president with the wide popular support that integrated the new demands of social movements in the 1960s was already existent in the first newsreels of 1963. *National Agency's Atualidades* newsreel, no.16, begins its set of reports with a square taken by people – men, women, and children – wielding posters supporting President Goulart. The filming is done from a high angle, which best favours the view of the agglomeration that awaits (and supports) him. Goulart emerges from the middle of the crowd, being carried in the arms of the workers. The image leaves no doubts: the president enjoyed huge prestige with the workers. Goulart seems indifferent to any risk to his safety and forgoes the typical ceremonial of the heads of state when approaching the workers. The stage that awaits him is improvised and small. This improvisation reinforces the impression of a militant experience, which dispenses great ceremonies and protocols. Goulart speaks to the workers apparently without the typical power staging of a head of state, but with enormous affinity and closeness to the working class.

**Figure 1** – Goulart being carried by the crowd. *National Agency Atualidades* newsreel no.16 (1963), 07min.03 sec. Frame moment: 03min.22sec.



Source: National Archive.

**Figure 2** – Goulart’s speech. *National Agency Atualidades* newsreel no.16 (1963), 07min.03 sec. Frame moment: 03min.38sec.



Source: National Archive.

He makes an equally improvised speech, with no text to help him. He looks like a politician in a continuous election campaign, vocalizing with enthusiasm to his listeners. He gestures a lot, distributes handshakes. The newsreel reports that he got a message from the workers to be handed to Pope Paul VI during his visit to Rome. The camera focuses on the message written in the hand of a worker to be delivered to Goulart. Voice over recording, with background music, narrates the images rendering them meaning. The newsreader says:

Brazilian workers pay homage to the president of the Republic by pledging solidarity to his government program. The workers asked the president to convey a message to Pope Paul VI and the Minister of Labour spoke before the crowd about the country’s economic and social policy. President João Goulart thanks the tribute, already with the message in hand, beseeching the workers to stand together to fight and overcome the difficulties that torment the nation (ATUALIDADES, 1963, no.16 – Our translation).

Hence, the popular support is indisputable in the images, presenting a close relationship between the president and workers, in a reciprocal way. His relation with the workers in the traditional celebration of Labour Day discloses some representations:

The simplest and perhaps the most significant celebration of May 1 was undoubtedly the private lunch of President João Goulart with the workers from Rio de Janeiro. The meeting takes place in the restaurant of SAPS, this popular institution in which the memory of Getúlio Vargas, its founder, is always present. A large mass of workers is concentrated in front of the SAPS,

waiting for the exit of the head of the nation who is also their natural leader, as demonstrated by the affection that the workers receive. May 1 takes the leader into the arms of the people (ATUALIDADES, 1963, no.8 – Our translation).

The popular support and João Goulart's image are linked to the legacy and the image of Getúlio Vargas. In this same edition no.8, there is the framing and focus of the camera on the picture of Vargas. Taking into account the symbolic date of May 1 to the promulgation of the Consolidation of Labour Laws (CLT), created in 1943, the edition consolidates João Goulart's public image within the labourism universe. Regarding Goulart's policy of basic reforms, the political and labourism legacy of Vargas is also summoned up in the edition no.24, of 1963, when the narrator shows that "a crowd attends Cinelândia next to the statue of the former President Getúlio Vargas to celebrate his memory" (ATUALIDADES, 1964, no.24 – Our translation). In this edition, there is also the presence of popular concentration with many flags, in view of Jango's speech. In a few seconds, we watched Goulart being carried by the people and saluting them, with a semblance of enthusiasm.

As Gomes (2006) has shown, this Goulart's spontaneity to relate to the workers and his aversion to the traditional protocols is a hallmark of his political image, built since the time when he was Minister of Labour of Getúlio Vargas (1953-1954). As Ferreira (2005) demonstrates, Goulart's style would soon bother conservative elites and entrepreneurs by opting for negotiation and dialogue with the trade union movement.

Goulart's political relations with the various social sectors also take place in the so-called "lunch meeting". These "meetings" entail the meeting of President Goulart with officers of the Armed Forces, trade union leaders, workers and religious authorities. This is the case of the no.28 when João Goulart offers lunch to the new generals of the Army; and no.8, when João Goulart had lunch with the workers of the *Serviço de Alimentação da Previdência Social* (Social Security Food Service – SAPS), on May 1; and no.17, when the president attends a luncheon with bishops and cardinals in Rome. The record of these meetings strengthens the image of a president who can dialogue with the different social spheres, although they also disclose the different positions adopted by Goulart in such meetings. If the meetings with workers are presented with images of enthusiasm, militancy, and leadership, in the "lunch meetings" with other social sectors there prevails a certain formality demanded by the governmental protocols. An instance is Goulart's meetings with military authorities. The narrator's speech doesn't linger over deeper issues, such as the speeches surrounding basic reforms or even lunches with the workers. Put differently, relations with businessmen, heads of the Armed Forces and more traditional sectors of Brazilian society do not receive the same attention in comparison to the reports about the meetings with workers, differing in the time devoted to them and, above all, in Goulart's soberer and more discreet behaviour in these events.



**Figure 3** – Lunch at SAPS. Goulart's speech. *National Agency Atualidades* newsreel no.8 (1963), 07min.30sec. Frame moment: 04min.58sec.



Source: National Archive.

**Figure 4** – Lunch at SAPS. Goulart being carried by workers. *National Agency Atualidades* newsreel no.8 (1963), 07min.30sec. Frame moment: 05min.35sec.



Source: National Archive.

**Figure 5** – Lunch with new Army generals. *National Agency Atualidades* newsreel no.38 (1963), 06min.18sec. Frame moment: 00min.59sec.



Source: National Archive.

The Brazilian foreign policy adopted by Goulart is another recurring theme. The newsreels highlight the president's, his ministers', and foreign authorities' trips to form the image of the government's ability to keep active the role of the country in the international field, based on national interests, that is, beyond the ideological polarization of the Cold War. This is the case of issue no.2, of 1963, which relates the successful trip of the Minister of Finance San Tiago Dantas to the United States in search of financial resources for the national economic recovery. The narrative highlights the "climate of high understanding in which the guidelines of political independence" and national sovereignty were once again respected, emphasizing that "the international concept of trust in the government of João Goulart is renovated" (ATUALIDADES, 1963, no.2 – Our translation). The use of expressions such as "high understanding" and "international concept of trust", existent in the narration of issue no.2, for example, demonstrates the friendly and fertile relationship between the United States and Brazil presented as a strategy of government legitimacy in the international arena.

In the same chart, the 1963 issue no.28 is dedicated entirely to the visit of the president of the communist Yugoslavia Josip Tito to Brazil and the political and economic relations between the countries. Goulart and his wife welcome the Yugoslav delegation at the Brasilia airport. Shortly thereafter, in the Alvorada Palace, Goulart and Tito speak in a "nearly informal atmosphere, even if following protocol", surrounded by guests. It stands out the Brazilian foreign policy and its opening "with all the nations of the world", in addition to the clauses of agreements of economic cooperation signed between the countries (ATUALIDADES, 1963, no.28 – Our translation). It must be noted that the opposition press promoted a series of criticisms of the nationalist government policy, asserting



that the country's development was threatened by the outpouring of foreign investment, promoted by the anti-progressive policy of the government. The newsreels, in turn, insist on the image of João Goulart from the independent relation and defence of sovereignty and national interests with other countries in a mixture of neutralization of the critique to the protectionism and the alignment to the international communism, on the one hand, and in the defence of an independent foreign policy, on the other. The Goulart government was in dialogue with both the USA and communist countries. In the Yugoslav case, the figure of Tito's widely spread relative independence vis-a-vis the centralism imposed by Moscow favoured the approximation to the ideals of national sovereignty proclaimed by Goulart.

Lastly, another important and persistently present debate in the investigated newsreels is the agrarian reform, regarded as a condition for overcoming the Brazilian underdevelopment in the countryside and as a solution for the rural worker precarious situation. Of the 19 *Atualidades* newsreels dedicated to the Goulart government, six approached subjects in relation to agrarian reform. The agrarian reform is highlighted in relation to other issues in the National Agency newsreels. The images emphasize the precarious situation of the rural worker through the precarious residences. The bodies also speak of the difficulties experienced, through tired faces and sad expressions.

**Figure 6** – Rural population. *National Agency Atualidades* newsreel no.8 (1963), 07min.30 sec. Frame Moment: 05min.38sec.



Source: National Archive.

**Figure 7** – Rural population. *National Agency Atualidades* newsreel no.8 (1963), 07min.30 sec. Frame moment: 05min.41sec.



Source: National Archive.

**Figure 8** – Rural workers. *National Agency Atualidades* newsreel no.8 (1963), 07min.30 sec. Frame moment: 06min.30sec.



Source: National Archive.

The voice-over narration, in a denouncement tone of the gravity of these people's living conditions and opposing the profits of large landowners, defines clearly with whom Goulart stood:

The rich estates like this are not very numerous, in our immense Brazil, but they are more and more prosperous. And its prosperity grows in that it isolates itself from the less fortunate ones, giving reason to those who said that in the barbed wire is the disgrace of our country. However, it is no longer possible to

ignore the clamour of those who are close to the earth and can't even earn their subsistence. The man in the field, forgotten and abandoned for centuries, sees hope on the horizon of our lands for better days. The agrarian reform, already proposed to the Congress, could be the realization of this hope: that of a fair distribution of our resources (ATUALIDADES, 1963, no.2 – Our translation).

In the issue no.3 of 1963, the newsreel defines the agrarian reform as the main political task to be put in effect in Brazil, and, although previous pre-projects have not been implemented, it supports the Goulart government's execution potential, stressing that this would incorporate the rural worker into the urban social achievements promoted by Vargas' labourism:

It has been for some time that a need for an agrarian reform has been felt in our country. More than 50 projects sent to the Chamber of Deputies there found their grave hoping that one day the nation will turn itself to its own realities. Among the basic reforms that the current government begins to accomplish, the agrarian reform imposes itself as being one of the fundamental ones. By greatly stimulating all producing sources, the reform will give the Brazilian producer the conditions compatible with the social achievements of our time (ATUALIDADES, 1963, no.3 – Our translation).

In the newsreel no.8 of 1963, the need for an agrarian reform is presented as a safeguard for future generations who will live from work on the land thanks to the future increase in the world demand for food. The video also depicts the case of producers in Rio de Janeiro who, in addition to receiving the land lots, will receive technical assistance for cultivation, claiming that this will be extended throughout Brazil in case the agrarian reform, within the framework of the government project, is put in effect:

Those who contemplate this common picture of inland Brazil, feel soon the need to reformulate the country's agrarian policy. There are two aspects that deserve to be emphasized: the first one is the need to save the new generations who live of the land, and the second is to stop the process of depletion of agriculture and livestock industry, bases of the economy of Brazil that in thirty years will have its population doubled. Here, these producers of the municipality of Campos, state of Rio, received their lots of land and will also have the necessary technical assistance to cultivate it. This is what is expected to take place in other areas of the country when the federal government has the means to put into effect the agrarian reform (ATUALIDADES, 1963, no.8 – Our translation).

The matter of agrarian reform is extended to urban popular demonstrations and demands, by urging the workers to stand up for reforms as a way of overcoming underdevelopment. This way, President João Goulart, through the proposed basic reforms, will also integrate the rural man as an equally relevant social actor in the labourism ideology. The agrarian reform, a key issue for his government, was one of the main political flags raised by Goulart and the Labourite left, such as Leonel Brizola (GRYNSZPAN, 2006, p.60). In addition to that, the political radicalization around the debate on agrarian reform projects presented at the National Congress has been considered by recent historiography as one of the causes that fomented the civil-military coup of 1964. Between 1940 and 1960, intellectuals and politicians focused on the question of the countryside, emphasizing the need for its modernization through agrarian reform. In the countryside, there was a growing mobilization of rural workers against the evictions promoted by the large landowners. The subject got ample space in the press; the peasants' struggles, increasingly organized and active, intensified (GRYNSZPAN, 2006).

The construction of Jango's image in relation to the rural environment is different from the one promoted by his relation with the urban workers. In the case of the rural world, there is neither any presence of Goulart with the peasants nor the rural environment. On that account, the scenes of the agrarian world and its social problems end up being associated more with the government and its political project than to the president himself.

Through the newsreels, the reforms are also linked to countercyclical measures for the national development through industrialization, highlighting the agrarian reform. In this regard, the agrarian reform would lead to development the most impoverished regions of the country, which, in the newsreel s.n.III, named as the "Steel Cycle", would be central to the survival of democracy:

A big portion of the Brazilian population, greatly pressured by structural distortions, continues to live in a constant process of impoverishment. Similar to the Northeast and the Amazon region, the state of Espírito Santo is included among the poorest states in the country. The Brazilian economy is clearly calling for urgent reforms that will transform its structure and provide our development. [...] A little over 10% of the total area of rural properties is cultivated. The agrarian reform imposes itself as the survival of democracy in our country (ATUALIDADES, 1963, s.n.III – Our translation).

The agrarian reform approach in the newsreels surpasses the other reform proposals advocated during Goulart's administration, with greater intensity as from 1963. Insofar as it calls for rights for rural workers and better working conditions in the field, the agrarian reform proposal would mean great advances for the economic and social development of the country. It is important to note that other agrarian reform projects were being negotiated

in the National Congress in this period. However, the political propaganda nature of the National Agency's newsreels overlooks this debate, forming the image that only the government seemed committed to achieving the agrarian reform and overcoming misery in the countryside. One of the typical strategies of these productions is exactly to strengthen the perception that the executive is the representative of the interests of the workers, identifying them as a superior value, one of "national interest". This narrative strategy turns Goulart into an incontestable leadership without political mediators as traditional parties or even the National Congress itself, reinforcing the executive role, a characteristic aspect of the Brazilian political culture. As a result, according to Ferreira:

The lack of auxiliary leaders to mediate conflicts and unburden Jango from the task of negotiating, deciding and executing agreements with the unions created a series of problems for the exercise of his authority. His wish to keep in direct line with the workers, not assigning the task to other party leaders, if on the one hand guaranteed the ties with the workers, on the other put him in the front line of the radical groups (FERREIRA, 2006, p.17 – Our translation).

The productions of the National Agency – considering their images, speeches, and messages inserted therein – are exhibited as a strengthening to the labourism and to Goulart's government. The president's public images associated with a good relation with urban workers, unions, and popular layers is the representation of labourism itself and extends Getúlio's pact. The handshakes with the workers, the frequent references to the image of Getúlio, the defence of the agrarian reform project, wind up becoming cardinal elements of the representation of Goulart's labourism in the newsreels of the National Agency. Examined in series, these representations acquire a larger dimension that contributes to historical studies about the period and to President João Goulart's image.

## Final considerations

The audio-visual productions of the newsreels centralize and emphasize his relationship with urban and rural workers, and Goulart's commitment to broadening their rights, linking "national interests" with "workers' interests". Other social actors, such as entrepreneurial and military elites, come forth laterally, reinforcing the centrality of workers to the film content. In these meetings with workers, Goulart's position is always of an apparent improvisation, strengthening the spontaneity and informality of the meetings.

Through the narratives of the newsreels, it is possible to perceive that the formation of an image of Goulart involved a broadening of the labourism pact to other themes and characters that pressured the Executive since the end of *Estado Novo*. This labourism, renovated by the radical and nationalist reformist influences emerges in the formation of the image of

Goulart in the newsreels, requalifying the terms of the debate. It is necessary to stress that this requalification was made necessary by the incalculable pressures of the Labourite movement, the peasantry leagues, the student movement. This is a period of strong social mobilization. Goulart's image was also elaborated around his position in the fight against the economic crisis, besides his positions to overcome the Brazilian political crisis.

João Goulart stood up for democracy with the support of the workers, insisted on the urgent need for basic reforms, minimized the importance of the traditional democratic institutions, especially the National Congress, crippled by party disputes. He was opposed to protocols when he met with the workers, presenting himself as their undisputed leader. He would keep the protocol in the formal meetings with heads of states, military, ecclesiastical elites, businessmen. He approached representatives of the Soviet world, at a time when anti-communism was growing vertiginously among the conservative spheres of Brazilian society.

The polarization in the Goulart period ended up leading part of the course of the country and the government itself. In 1963, the country found itself under constant social upheavals and movements, mainly due to political instability and the growing crisis in the economic sector. It was also the year with the biggest audio-visual production made by the National Agency as well, as a strategy to generate a dialogue with society – especially the working class – through film representations, at a time of political and economic crisis. Therefore, film productions made by a governmental and official institution would act as a reinforcement in promoting a social and public image of the president and, consequently, of his government. Through propaganda instruments, the government stressed its reformist political project based on the building of its self-image. Audio-visual productions were one of the tools used to legitimize the government in front of Brazilian society and the political, economic and social conjuncture of the country.

The public image built by the Goulart government bothered deeply the conservative sectors that struck the coup against the president and democracy on March 31, 1964. It was the end of hopes for basic reforms. The legacies of 21 years of dictatorship are still present in the daily life of Brazilian society. The cultural and political ebullience, with its multiple projects to overcome national evils, reverberate in the memory of those who lived the boiling of the struggle for social justice and the political radicalization of the 1960s.

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