CHAPTER THREE: The “Revolta da Chibata,” November 22 – 26, 1910

In the late evening of November 22, João Batista das Neves, the 54-year-old Brazilian naval commander of the dreadnought battleship Minas Gerais, returned to his post for the evening.¹ The scene: Rio de Janeiro’s resplendent Guanabara Bay. He had been dining that evening aboard the French warship Duguay-Trouin with several of the foreign ship’s lieutenants.² During this period, upper-class Brazilians viewed the French as the paragon of civilized society. One can only imagine the dinner conversation between Commander Neves and the French officers. In light of Brazil’s recent acquisition of fourteen new and powerful ships from England, including the Minas Gerais itself, the men almost undoubtedly would have discussed the Brazilian navy’s recent push towards modernization.

Upon returning to the Minas Gerais at 10:00 p.m., Batista das Neves was greeted with a shocking sight; hundreds of rioting sailors blocked him from boarding the ship, crying “Long live liberty!” and “End the chibata!” The commander and several loyal sailors attempted to storm the ship, but they were killed quickly by the rebellious forces.³ As the rebels had planned, the insurrection spread quickly throughout the rest of the navy. By 11:00 p.m., the rebels had gained control of four of the most powerful warships in the Brazilian navy: the light cruiser Babia and the coastal battleship Deodoro, both potent weapons at 3,150 tons; and the formidable pair of dreadnoughts, Minas Gerais and São Paulo, the two most powerful ships in the world. Of the four, all but the Deodoro had been purchased from England that same year as part of the country’s naval

---
¹ For a map and chronology of the events in Guanabara Bay throughout November and December of 1910, see Appendix C on pages 159-160. This appendix charts the events described in Chapter Three, Chapter Four, and the Conclusion.
² Nascimento, “Do convés ao porto,” 11. Ironically, the Duguay-Trouin was named for the French pirate, Admiral René Duguay-Trouin, who successfully captured Rio de Janeiro in September 1711 and held the state governor for ransom.
³ Morgan, “Legacy of the Lash,” 188.
modernization project. The rebels succeeded in gaining control of these ships with relatively few casualties; that night, twenty men were killed in total, including six officers. The movement was planned and executed entirely by enlisted men; no officers were involved. Altogether, approximately 1,300 of the 4,000 sailors in the Brazilian Navy took part in the revolt.

What motivated Brazilian sailors to lead this massive uprising? These men, overwhelmingly lower-class Afro-Brazilians, rebelled against their white officers to protest inhumane – indeed, slave-like – conditions in the Brazilian navy, particularly the use of the chibata. As was shown in the previous chapter, these conditions had been widespread throughout the navy for decades. Yet while Brazilian sailors had resented their treatment for many years, it took months of planning and a single rallying event for the reclamantes to mobilize an effective and organized uprising. This triggering event occurred on November 16. That morning, Marcelino Rodrigues Menezes, an Afro-Brazilian sailor on the Minas Gerais, was given 200 lashes with the chibata for insubordination against an officer. As was the longstanding tradition in the Brazilian navy, officers assembled the ship’s entire crew of 370 men to watch this brutal punishment unfold – a harsh reminder of the consequences for upsetting the rigid hierarchy in the Brazilian navy. Just six days later, the rebels launched their revolt. Yet Menezes’s brutal whipping merely provided the spark for the movement. Under the leadership of João Cândido, a black non-commissioned officer of the first class, and with influence from their

---

4 Two other ships also contributed to the revolt: the majority of the crew of the cruiser República boarded the São Paulo, while the cruiser-torpedo boat Timbira passively supported the rebellious ships. The two documents to discuss this fact are: Joaquim Marques Batista de Leão, Ministro da Marinha: Relatório Apresentado ao Presidente da República dos Estados Unidos do Brasil (Rio de Janeiro: Imprensa Naval, 1911), 9. [Housed at SDM. Also accessible online at http://brazil.crfl.edu/bsd/bsd/u2145/index.html]; and Martins, A revolta dos marinheiros, 41. Moreover, upon hearing news of the revolt, the crews of another seven ships in the navy abandoned their posts altogether and fled for the safety of land. Thus, in total, 13 ships in the Brazilian Navy participated in, passively supported, or fled from the November Revolt – over half of the 22 total ships in the navy. Jornal do Comércio, 24 November 1910, 3. For the number of ships in the Brazilian navy, see da Cunha, A Revolta na Esquadra Brasileira, 42.

5 Morgan, “Legacy of the Lash,” 188-89. Aboard the São Paulo, just one officer was killed; all others who opposed the revolt were sent to shore peacefully. On the Deodoro, the rebels gained control of the battleship without a single casualty. Every historian of the revolt has pegged the number of rebellious sailors at 2,379 men. Closer analysis reveals that this number is the result of flawed reasoning by H. Pereira da Cunha in his 1953 work, A revolta na esquadra brasileira em novembro e dezembro de 1910. More reliable primary sources suggest that the number is far lower; 1,500 at the very most, and most likely only 1,300. For a detailed explanation of this issue, see Appendix A, page 139.

time training in England in 1909 to 1910, the rebels had been carefully planning the uprising for over six months.  

As their movement was driven by claims for improved rights, the rebels called themselves the *reclamantes* (the aggrieved). Throughout the revolt, each of the rebels’ four ships flew two different, seemingly contradictory flags: the red flag of rebellion, and the new Brazilian flag, with its Positivist motto: “Order and Progress.” This second flag reflected the non-political nature of the uprising – Cândido and his fellow sailors did not stage the revolt against the government itself, but rather in protest of their treatment in the naval ranks. With a combined 100 cannons trained on Rio de Janeiro, the rebels demanded immediate recognition of their demands, under pains of shelling the city. Throughout the four-day revolt, Cândido maintained the overall military chain of command. With a combination of limited force and political negotiations, the *reclamantes* coerced the Brazilian National Congress into acknowledging their grievances and granting them amnesty. To the shock of both Brazilian and foreign observers, the navy’s long-oppressed sailors not only piloted the ships masterfully without their officers, but they successfully compelled the Brazilian government to grant them their demands.

For powerful Brazilian politicians who equated military control with a civilized nation – particularly the recently elected President Fonseca and the Minister of the Navy, Joaquim Marques Batista de Leão – the *Revolta da Chibata* presented an impossible conundrum. This was an affront to the social, military, and racial order of the day, and it embarrassed Brazil’s political and naval leaders intent on modernizing their country. That the revolt took place in Rio de Janeiro only worsened the sting. In 1910, Rio was unquestionably the most important city in Brazil – the nation’s capital,

---

8 Morgan, “Roots of a Rebellion” 12. The time that these Brazilian sailors spent in England and its effects on their revolutionary attitudes remains clouded in mystery. According to Soares, João Cândido “‘shaped and perfected [his revolutionary sentiments] during his long stay in England.’” Soares, *Política versus Marinha*, no page given, qtd. by Freyre, *Order and Progress*, 399. As Morgan argues in his unpublished paper, “Roots of a Rebellion,” it is virtually impossible that the Brazilian sailors were ignorant of the highly organized and empowered British sailors in the shipyards of Newcastle.
commercial and cultural center, and symbol to the world of the country’s modernization, not to
mention home to 850,000 cariocas.\(^9\)

During these four tension-filled days that the reclamantes held Rio de Janeiro hostage,
Brazilian politicians advanced two concurrent – and at times, competing – movements to address
the revolt. The first, a negotiated settlement with the rebels, was the product of three Congressmen:
José Carlos de Carvalho in the House of Deputies, and Rui Barbosa and Pinheiro Machado in the
Senate. Simultaneously, President Fonseca and Minister Leão frantically pursued a military
counterattack, even as its success grew increasingly unlikely. Both camps framed their responses to
the revolt – whether negotiations or sheer force – in terms of the movement to modernize Brazil, so
popular among powerful Brazilians of the era. In the case of the negotiating, the Congressmen –
particularly Senator Barbosa – argued that granting amnesty and greater rights to the reclamantes
would launch the country into the ranks of the more “civilized” nations. In contrast, President
Fonseca and his military advisers interpreted the uprising as a shameful attack on the nation’s
dignity, one that had to be suppressed decisively to regain Brazil’s lost prestige. As the events of the
November Revolt unfolded, these two opposing responses to the revolt played out in complex and
unexpected ways. Ultimately, with the end of the revolt on November 26, Congress granted the
rebels amnesty, but it was a tenuous settlement, and highly offensive to Fonseca and his advisers.

João Cândido: A Black Man’s Unlikely Ascendancy in the Navy

Though the Revolta da Chibata was the product of the collective grievances held by some
1,300 sailors in the Brazilian Navy, one man in particular enabled the movement. João Cândido
Felisberto, the leader of the 1910 revolt, was far from a typical sailor in the Brazilian Navy.\(^10\)
Cândido was born in 1880 to João and Ignácia Cândido Velho, two former slaves. He was raised

\(^9\) Meade, “Civilizing” Rio, 5.
\(^10\) For a portrait of Cândido, see Image 8 in Appendix B, page 153.
with his seven siblings on a farm in Rio Pardo, a town in the interior of the southern state of Rio Grande do Sul, on the same farm where his parents had previously worked in servitude. At age 10, young Cândido was sent to the navy for having provoked the ire of his parents’ former master, João Felipe Corrêa. Yet Corrêa had a soft spot for the boy, and he used his personal connection to the influential Naval Admiral, Alexandrino de Alencar, to place Cândido on an accelerated path in the navy.\textsuperscript{11} At the age of 15, Cândido was already a full-time sailor, and by the time he was 20, he was carrying out tasks of great responsibility: he oversaw the training of new naval apprentices and mediated conflicts on board ships. In 1897, Cândido was transferred to the Riachuelo, the most powerful battleship in the navy’s arsenal. Three years later, Cândido was serving on board the Riachuelo as it carried Manuel Ferraz Campos Sales, the president-elect of Brazil, to Argentina for an official visit.\textsuperscript{12} By 1910, Cândido had ascended to the position of non-commissioned officer of the first-class. Given the de facto discrimination against Afro-Brazilians during the era, this was the highest rank that a man of color could possibly hold in the Brazilian Navy.\textsuperscript{13}

When much of the Brazilian fleet and crews relocated to England from 1909 to 1910, João Cândido was among these 1,000 or so Brazilian sailors who made the trans-Atlantic trip. During this period, Cândido and a core of like-minded sailors began to crystallize their thoughts on how to effect change in the Brazilian Navy. They became intimately acquainted with recent naval history, including such important recent events as the 1904 Sino-Japanese War and the 1905 Potemkin Revolt in Russia, in which enlisted men overthrew their officers and seized a battleship in protest of

\textsuperscript{11} Fernando Granato, \textit{O Negro da chibata: Marinheiro que colocou a República na mira dos canhões} (Rio de Janeiro: Objetiva, 2000), 7-8. Though it is more popular than scholarly in nature, Granato’s work is the best existing biography of Cândido.

\textsuperscript{12} Granato, \textit{O Negro da Chibata}, 16-17.

\textsuperscript{13} The unique recruitment practices of the Brazilian navy during this period explicitly prevented Afro-Brazilians from ascending beyond the rank of non-commissioned officer, the level that Cândido had achieved by 1910. Two independent pipelines fed into the ranks; the officer ranks were drawn exclusively from the white elite, while the lower ranks were drawn almost exclusively from the dark-skinned “undesirables” of cities like Rio. See Chapter Two for a more detailed explanation.
poor conditions and spoiled food. A revolutionary consciousness, already present in some of the sailors, began to take form among crews during this period, and plans for an uprising gradually began forming. By June 1910, the leaders had been chosen and word had spread through much of the navy’s enlisted ranks. The ideological grounding for the November Revolt was now established.

While most of his fellow sailors merely picked up ideological inspiration while in England, Cândido also absorbed significant technical expertise. As one of Cândido’s comrades later recounted of his time in England during this period, “He took the initiative to seek out foreign mechanics, establishing intimate relations with them and learning much about naval technology.” This mastery of the state-of-the-art new battleships would prove crucial once Cândido led the revolt in November of 1910.

Notably, however, Cândido was not single-mindedly focused on rebellion as the only solution to the navy’s woes. In May of 1910, João Cândido personally met with President Nilo Peçanha at the presidential Palace to discuss reforms in the navy. This encounter was no regular occurrence in Brazilian politics, but rather a reflection of Cândido’s personal connection to the Minister of the Navy, Alexandrino de Alencar. Indeed, Cândido was the first sailor ever to have had an official visit with the president in the 21-year history of the Republic. “In name of every sailor,” Cândido stated to the president, “I want to take this opportunity to ask you for the end of the chibata, which has so humiliated our standing.” Though Peçanha was sympathetic with the sailors’ cause, he commanded essentially no political power at this point; that March, Fonseca had been elected as Brazil’s new president. Peçanha also accurately recognized that, given the strong influence

16 “A Revolta na Armada,” Estado de São Paulo, 26 November 1910, 4. “Elle, por seu gusto, procurou os mechanicos estrangeiros, entabloal relações intimas com elles e apprehendeu muita coisa ue dizem respeito á technical naval.”
18 Granato, O Negro da Chibata, 33. “Em nome de toda a marujada, quero aproveitar a oportunidade e pedir ao senhor o fim da chibata, que tanto humilha nossa categoria.”

61
of naval leaders in national politics, attempting to impose reforms on the navy without a strong justification would amount to political suicide. Cândido emerged from this meeting convinced that more drastic actions would need to be taken. In the months to come, he organized a covert and large-scale movement to mobilize Brazilian sailors for the coming uprising.

The Reclamantes’ Initial Communications with the Government

On the evening of November 22, these plans for insurrection unfolded with nearly clocklike precision. Just an hour after Cândido and the rest of the crew of the Minas Gerais had seized control of the dreadnought from Captain Neves at 10:00 p.m., all four ships were firmly under the rebels’ control. At this point, the reclamantes sent a telegram to Vice-Admiral Joaquim Marques Batista de Leão, the Minister of the Navy. In it, they demanded the immediate abolition of corporal punishment in the navy. As was discussed in Chapter Two, the chibata had been officially abolished several times by federal decree, yet naval officers continued to administer the lash frequently and brutally. If the government did not banish corporal punishment from the navy once and for all, the rebels stated in their initial telegram, they would fire on the capital.

President Fonseca was attending an opera at the prestigious Tijuca Club when he was informed of the uprising. Like many other members of the government, Fonseca’s initial worry was that the movement was politically motivated. Given the context of the period in Brazil, these fears were justified. The President had been in office for just seven days, and this only after the bitter and divisive election against Senator Rui Barbosa. Moreover, since the monarchy had been replaced with a Republic in 1889, military insurrections had occurred in Brazil with great frequency; from 1889 to

---

19 Morel, A Revolta da Chibata, 141-42. Peçanha had particularly little political power during this period, as he had only assumed office in June 1909 after the death of President Afonso Pena. His clashes with powerful Senator Pinheiro Machado (who plays a prominent role in the political battles described in Chapter Three) also left Peçanha politically weakened.
1910, ten uprisings had occurred in the army and navy, nearly all of them with the aim of overthrowing the government.\textsuperscript{20}

Upon establishing that the reclamantes’ goals were improved conditions in the navy and not overthrowing the government, Minister Leão issued the following response:

“The Minister of the Navy, on behalf of the president of the Republic, declares that the demands, while just and based in the law, can only be addressed when made with deference and respect to the constitutional powers.”\textsuperscript{21}

From this point forward, President Fonseca refused to respond personally to any of the rebels’ telegrams. Moreover, in an attempt to prevent the reclamantes from gaining public sympathy, Fonseca resolved at 1:20 a.m. on November 23 to censor all of their subsequent dispatches from the press.\textsuperscript{22}

In a letter dated November 22, but not delivered to President Fonseca until the following afternoon, the reclamantes clearly outlined the grievances that had led to their revolt:

“We, as sailors, Brazilian citizens and members of the Republic, can no longer withstand the slavery as practiced in the Brazilian Navy… [W]e send this honorable message so that his Excellency may grant to Brazilian sailors the sacred rights guaranteed to us by the laws of the Republic… dismiss the incompetent and indignant officers from serving the Brazilian nation… reform the Immoral and Shameful code that governs us so that the chibata disappears… raise our wages… educate those sailors who do not have the competence to wear our proud uniform, order a limit on our daily service, seeing that it is respected.

Your Excellency has a deadline of 12 hours to send us a satisfactory response, under the penalty of seeing the Nation annihilated.”\textsuperscript{23}

\textsuperscript{20} de Carvalho, \textit{Forças Armadas}, 15.

\textsuperscript{21} Martins, \textit{A revolta dos marinheiros}, 22. “O Ministro da Marinha, em nome do presidente da República, declara que reclamações, quando justas e baseadas na lei, só podem ser atendidas quando feitas com subordinação e respeito aos poderes constituídos.”

\textsuperscript{22} \textit{Correio da Manhã}, 23 November 1910, 2\textsuperscript{nd} ed., 1. Fonseca was apparently unsuccessful in this effort to block the rebels’ messages from publication, as dozens were reprinted in \textit{carioca} dailies in the days to come.

\textsuperscript{23} Morel, \textit{A Revolta da Chibata}, 86-87. This edition reprints a complete facsimile of the original telegram. “Nós, marinheiros, cidadãos brasileiros e republicanos, não podendo mais suportar a escravidão da Marinha Brasileira… mandamos esta honrada mensagem para que V. Excia. faça os Marinheiros Brasileiros possuírem os direitos sagrados que as leis da República nos facilita… retirar os oficiais incompetentes e indignos de servir a Nação Brasileira… Reformar o Código Imoral e Vergonhoso que nos rege, a fim de que desapareça a chibata… aumentar o soldo… educar os marinheiros que não têm competência para vestir a orgulhosa farda, mandar por em vigor a tabela de serviço diário, que a acompanha. Tem V. Excia. o prazo de 12 horas, para mandar-nos a resposta satisfatória, sob pena de ver a Pátria aniquilada.” Historians generally accept that this letter and a majority of the telegrams sent by the reclamantes were written by Francisco Dias Martins, the leader of the \textit{Bahia} and author of the threatening note mentioned at the end of Chapter 2 signed by the “Black Hand.” The 21-year-old Martins was a rare man of letters among the largely illiterate naval crews of the period. Raised by a middle-class family in the northern province of Ceará, he received a secondary education and
In this manifesto, the reclamantes issued five major demands: the dismissal of all officers on board the four rebellious ships, an increase in wages, a limit on daily service, improved training and education for sailors in the navy, and, most imperatively, the abolition of the chibata and other forms of corporal punishment. As historian Zachary Morgan notes, the mention of the “slavery as practiced in the Brazilian Navy” was not merely rhetorical – as was shown in Chapter Two, conditions on the ships of this period were truly brutal enough to warrant this comparison.24

Panic Spreads through Rio de Janeiro

The population of Rio de Janeiro awoke on the morning of November 23 to the prospect of imminent bombardment. “Several Ships of the Squadron have Revolted: Rio and Niterói are attacked by gun and cannonball,” screamed a headline from one carioca paper.25 Yet throughout the revolt, João Cândido and his men practiced humanitarian restraint, minimizing casualties while focusing on their underlying goals. This was reflected in their initial uprising on the night of November 22, when the reclamantes spared the vast majority of the officers on board their ships.26 A telegram sent from the Minas Gerais to Minister Leão at 7:30 a.m. also reveals the rebels’ disciplined approach: “We do not wish to harm anyone. We only request a raise in salary without the chibata. In the name of the deceased, we request an official audience to speak with us before 12 noon.”27 Notably, the rebels had significantly pared down their demands at this point from five to two: the

even served as the president of a literary club for sailors on the Bahia. After graduating from the apprentice schools at age 17, he rapidly ascended the ranks, and by 1910 he had reached first-class status – the same level as Cândido. For background on Martins, see: Morgan, “Legacy of the Lash,” 186-87; and Murilo, Pontos e Borados, 29.

25 Correio da Manhã, 23 November 1910, 1st ed, 1. “Alguns Navos da Esquara Revoltam-se: O Rio e Niterói são atingidos por balas de canhão e fuzilaria.” Niterói is Rio’s sister city, and lies across Guanabara Bay to the east. For a clearer depiction of the geography of Rio de Janeiro and the location of events of the revolt, see Appendix C.
26 Officially, there were 267 officers on board the four ships that participated in the revolt; during the course of the uprising, the reclamantes killed only six, sending the remaining men freely to shore. Da Cunha, A revolta na esquadra brasileira, 42.
27 Correio da Manhã, 23 November 1910, 2nd ed, 1 “Não queremos fazer mal a ninguém. Pedimos apenas augmentation de soldo sem chibata. Em nome dos mortos, pedimos commissão venha falar antes de meio dia.”
abolition of corporal punishment and an increased salary. They received no response from the government; President Fonseca maintained his refusal to negotiate personally with the rebels while they held arms. Though the reclamantes sent several more telegrams throughout the morning echoing these same demands, the president continued to ignore their dispatches, all while exploring plans for a military counterstrike.

Faced with an unresponsive government, the reclamantes grew increasingly hostile. That morning, they began planning for an extended siege. Under the threat of shelling the city, Cândido and his fellow rebels demanded ammunition and provisions, a practice they would continue throughout the revolt. They also seized large reserves of coal from a depot on Vienna Island and several vessels that were intended for French and English battleships in Guanabara Bay. By all accounts, the reclamantes inspired awe and terror among those on land: they dominated all sea traffic throughout the city’s bay, deftly performed military exercises, and fired numerous light-caliber shells at Rio and Niterói, including several over the president’s Palace, which was situated in the exposed neighborhood of Catete, just several hundred feet from the water. Yet throughout the revolt, the reclamantes expressly avoided mass casualties – they only used smaller artillery, and they aimed their fire over the city and at less-populated areas. Still, the bombardment was not completely bloodless; at 9:00 a.m., a grenade from the Minas Gerais killed two children living in the Castelo neighborhood of downtown Rio. Including these casualties, the reclamantes killed three civilians and wounded two others during the revolt.

The threat of imminent bombardment caused panic throughout the city. On November 23 alone, over 3,000 upper-class cariocas crammed into twelve private railroad cars bound for Petrópolis,

---

29 Jornal do Comércio, 24 November 1910, 3.
30 Estado de São Paulo, 25 November 1910, 2. In an interview some years later, João Cândido asserted that the reclamantes never intended to kill innocent civilians. Morel, A Revolta da Chibata, 89. After the fact, the sailors purportedly pooled 200 mil-reais of their salaries to give to the families of the deceased. Granato, O Negro da Chibata, 50.
a northern suburb of Rio. Many thousands more fled on foot or via carriages. 31 “The city is completely in panic,” stated one carioca daily. 32

Naval leaders believed that enlisted men could not maneuver the ships on their own. Foreigners, too, doubted that Brazilian crews – even with their officers – could handle the new British ships. 33 As events unfolded on November 23, however, it became increasingly clear that the rebels were both well-organized and dangerous. On November 24, the Jornal do Comércio of Rio reported that, “The São Paulo and Minas continued to perform evolutions with great precision of movement”; another prominent carioca reporter noted the rebels’ “masterful expertise.” 34 Lieutenant John S. Hammond, an American military attaché present during the revolt, submitted the following report to the U.S. Office of Naval Intelligence:

“On the morning of the 23rd the squadron passed out of the harbor of Rio (a very difficult channel)… About noon the ships returned to the harbor. They were handled in a manner that was nothing short of wonderful considering that the commanders, in every case were seamen, (no officers were among the mutineers).” 35

A British eyewitness who had seen extensive service in the Royal Navy echoed Hammond’s incredulous reaction to the rebels:

“The handling of the Brazilian warships sans officers was a novel sight to us. I confess that I never saw evolutions performed in a smarter style than those undergone by the mutinous warships… All day long the mutinous ships performed evolutions in the bay and at night retired in perfect order to the anchorage grounds outside, signaling all the time. I doubt whether a flag officer of rank would have done any better.” 36

Both Brazilians and foreigners agreed – the reclamantes represented a serious threat to the city of Rio de Janeiro. How to respond to this threat, however, remained a controversial and divisive issue that

31 Morel, A Revolta da Chibata, 76.
33 Morgan, “Legacy of the Lash,” 198-205. Morgan effectively debunks the myth, created and perpetuated by many naval historians, that the rebels were generally inept and unable to fire their large caliber guns.
would play out dramatically between Brazilian politicians and naval leaders over the subsequent three days.

**Divergent Military and Civilian Responses**

Upon first hearing of the revolt on the night of November 22, Fonseca and his military advisers immediately initiated plans for a military counterattack.\(^\text{37}\) Given the *reclamantes*’ superior firepower and organization, this would not be easy. As Minister Leão later wrote of the uncertain early hours of the revolt,

> At this moment, it was not possible to say with absolute certainty which ships were in rebellion; it was, however, known that the light cruiser battleship *Barroso*, the school ships *Benjamin Constant* and *Primeiro de Março* the light cruiser *Rio Grande do Sul* and the division of eight destroyers all had remained faithful to the government.\(^\text{38}\)

As Leão’s words clearly show, the November Revolt took the rest of the Brazilian navy completely by surprise. Of the twelve faithful ships named by Minister Leão, the most powerful were the two light cruiser battleships. The *Barroso* had 152 mm cannons, the largest of any of this dozen of ships, but predated the Naval Renovation project; it had been imported from England in 1895, meaning that its technology was relatively dated. The *Rio Grande do Sul*, however, was a new ship – it had been one of the 14 battleships imported from England in 1910 – and featured ten 120 mm guns.\(^\text{39}\)

Though the rebels controlled only four ships (with at least two more, the *Timbira* and *Paraíba*, sympathetic to their cause) as compared to the twelve controlled by the government forces, the *reclamantes* unquestionably possessed greater firepower. The mere fact that the rebels were at the

---

\(^\text{37}\) *Correio da Manhã*, 23 November 1910, 1.
\(^\text{38}\) Leão, *Relatório*, 6. “No momento não era possível certeza absoluta sobre quais eram os navios revoltados; sabia-se comtudo que o cruzador *Barroso*, os navios-escola *Benjamin Constant* e *Primeiro de Março*, o scout *Rio Grande do Sul* e a divisão de oito destroyers conservavam-se fieis ao Governo.”
helm of the two mighty dreadnoughts, São Paulo and Minas Gerais – each displacing 19,280 tons and featuring a dozen twelve-inch guns – guaranteed them naval supremacy throughout the revolt.⁴⁰

In the early hours of November 23, Minister Leão ordered all loyal ships in the navy to “start their engines immediately in preparation for combat,” and called all of the remaining sailors to duty.⁴¹ While the loyal forces outnumbered the reclamantes – estimates place the latter group at 1,300 men and the former at roughly 2,700 – naval officers nonetheless distrusted the devotion of the non-rebellious sailors.⁴² This attitude was understandable – recall that with the outbreak of hostilities on the night of November 22 and rebellious activity on board six ships, the crews on board another seven ships had immediately abandoned their posts for land as well.⁴³ In manning the non-rebellious ships on November 23, the naval leadership insisted that all positions of combat be filled with officers – a highly unorthodox order for any navy. Correspondingly, many enlisted men were shifted from positions of power and others were dismissed altogether.⁴⁴ In addition, the crews loyal to the government significantly lacked firemen, who were essential to running modern ships in the Brazilian Navy.⁴⁵ In contrast, the reclamantes were united behind a common cause and well-organized under the leadership of João Cândido.

Though the rebels held strong advantages in firepower and organization, naval leaders nonetheless maintained confidence throughout the revolt that they could outmaneuver and vanquish

⁴⁰Martins provides a concise summary of the actions and allegiances of the men on board each non-rebellious ship in the Brazilian Navy during the revolt. Martins, A revolta dos marinheiros, 41-51. Morel and Martins both argue convincingly that the rebels had significantly more powerful ships than the government. See page 91 for a more in depth analysis of this issue. Morel, A Revolta da Chibata, 99; Martins, A revolta dos marinheiros, 65-66.
⁴¹Leão, Relatório, 4, “puxasse fogos imediatamente aprestando-se para combate.”
⁴²According to da Cunha, there were nominally 2,379 rebellious sailors and 2,630 sailors loyal to the government, but as shown above, these numbers are significantly inflated. Nonetheless, given the estimate that there were only 1,300 rebels, it is still likely that there was a greater number of loyal sailors. Da Cunha, A revolta na esquadra brasileira, 40.
⁴³Jornal do Comércio, 24 November 1910, 3.
⁴⁴Leão, Relatório, 12; Da Cunha, A revolta na esquadra brasileira, 34, 40; Martins, A revolta dos marinheiros, 61.
the reclamantes. Indeed, the actions taken by Fonseca and his military advisers throughout the revolt reveal their intent to suppress this affront to the military establishment. Starting on November 23, Minister Leão took several aggressive but ultimately futile measures against the rebels. First, he attempted to mine the 8-mile entrance to Guanabara Bay. Due to logistical complications and the diplomatic implications of surrounding Brazil’s largest port with explosives, this effort quickly fizzled. Leão also gave orders to collect torpedoes from naval arsenals around Guanabara Bay to help in the counterattack. This effort failed as well; the reclamantes successfully controlled the bay throughout the revolt, preventing the government from achieving its mission. The matter was further complicated by miscommunication between Leão and his officers. After a full 48 hours, the loyal forces were not able to scrounge even a dozen torpedoes. Given that the Minas Gerais and São Paulo featured torpedo nets and massively strong hulls, it is questionable whether these weapons could have inflicted any damage on the rebellious ships anyway.

President Fonseca, too, insisted that the government would be able to crush the rebels easily, despite strong evidence to the contrary. At 2:00 p.m. on November 23, Fonseca’s Minister of Justice, Rivadavia Corrêa, sent the following telegram to the president of the state of São Paulo:

“The government, perfectly equipped to suffocate the revolt, is acting with all of its energy. There is complete order in the city, and the population is confident in the government.”

In no way did this message reflect reality; rather, it distorted the truth to portray the federal government as strong and in control. In actuality, during the afternoon of November 23 in Rio de Janeiro, thousands of cariocas were fleeing the city, and Fonseca’s military aides were frantically trying to muster forces to combat the rebels, largely to no avail. Even though an effective military response to the revolt was highly

---

47 Leão, Relatório, 11. Minister Leão explains that after the loyal armed forces had prepared the mining counter attack for over two days, from November 23 to 25, this plan still was essentially nonexistent.
48 Leão, Relatório, 8-9.
49 “Um telegramma official,” Estado de São Paulo, 24 November 1910, 5. “O governo perfeitamente apparelhado para suffocar a revolta, está agindo com toda a energia. A ordem na cidade é completa e a população está confiante no governo.”
unlikely, it was clearly important for President Fonseca to project the image of a forceful and capable central government to the country and the world.

As the government’s counterattack sputtered and the rebels continued to maneuver aggressively in Guanabara Bay, it became clear that negotiations would be necessary to resolve the crisis. José Gomes Pinheiro Machado, a highly influential senator from the southern state of Rio Grande do Sul, initiated the push for a diplomatic resolution. On the morning of November 23, the senator called on Congressional Deputy José Carlos de Carvalho (who had previously served as a naval commander) to negotiate directly with the reclamantes. Like Machado, Carvalho hailed from Rio Grande do Sul, and he was loyal to the senator, calling him “my boss in politics” on numerous occasions. As Carvalho later stated, Machado had tapped him as lead negotiator with the task of investigating “what actions were necessary to get out of such an unexpected and distressing situation.” Specifically, Carvalho’s mission was to assess the strength of the rebels and investigate their demands, and to understand whether the revolt could be better solved through military or political means.

Carvalho was uniquely positioned for this delicate task of negotiation, having extensive experience in the nation’s military and political spheres. Since becoming a naval officer in 1868, he had played a prominent role in responding to several major military uprisings, including those in 1880, 1891, 1892 and 1893. He was also already sympathetic to the reclamantes’ demands; that past September, he had presented a bill in Congress to raise the sailors’ average salary. Indeed, in their original manifesto to the government, the rebels specifically cited their support of Carvalho’s plan.

---

51 Anais do Câmara, Vol. 8, 454. “o que era necessário fazer-se para sahir-se de tão inesperada e aflitiva situação.”
52 Martins, A revolta dos marinheiros, 105-07.
53 Morel, A Revolta da Chibata, 86-87. Deputy Carvalho’s bill met with some resistance in Congress and was shelved temporarily.
Given his unique background in the Brazilian navy and government, Carvalho was, in the words of one historian, “Without a doubt…the most appropriate man to board a rebellious ship and be well received.” Over the three days to follow, the Deputy served as a crucial and cool-headed intermediary between the reclamantes and the Fonseca government. Indeed, given the heightened tensions between the two groups, it is unlikely that the revolt could have been settled peacefully without Carvalho’s intervention.

At 1:00 p.m. on November 23, Carvalho pulled aside the São Paulo on a ship flying the white flag of peace. Though they lacked officers on board, the rebels received him with all of the proper military honors, including salutes and music from the ship’s band. Over the course of the afternoon, he spoke extensively with the men on board both dreadnoughts, listening to their demands and assessing the condition and strength of each vessel. After moving to the Minas Gerais, Carvalho heard further demands from João Cândido and his men. At the request of the rebels, he also examined sailor Marcelino Rodrigues Menezes, the sailor who had received a punishment of 200 lashes a week earlier. Upon returning to shore, Carvalho brought Menezes to the Naval Hospital for treatment.

Following his tours of the São Paulo and Minas Gerais, Carvalho returned to land in the late afternoon to report his findings. After meeting privately with President Fonseca and Senator Machado, he spoke extensively to his fellow Congressmen in the Chamber of Deputies. During the course of his speech, Carvalho articulated the reclamantes’ major grievances: excessive work, inadequate rations, and the brutal use of the chibata. Continuing with his sympathetic attitude towards the rebels, Deputy Carvalho related the words of a sailor on board the São Paulo:

“Powerful ships such as these can neither be overseen nor maintained by the half-dozen marines who are on board; the work has been doubled, the rations are terrible and poorly prepared, and our punishments have been shamelessly increased. We are

54 Nascimento, “Do convés ao porto,” 22. “Sem sombra de dúvida…o homem mais indicado para subir num navio rebelado e ser bem recebido”
in a true moment of desperation: without food, overworked, and with our skin torn by corporal punishment, it has reached the point of cruelty.”

To emphasize the gravity of the latter point, Carvalho described the state of Menezes, the whipped sailor. “Mr. President,” Deputy Carvalho stated frankly, “the back of this sailor resembles a mullet sliced open for salting.”

Though Senator Machado had initially planned Carvalho’s negotiations as a fact-finding mission for the government, it in fact served to advance the reclamantes’ cause. Specifically, Carvalho’s speech in Congress helped supported the revolt in two ways. First, it allowed for a clear and public articulation of the rebels’ demands. Prior to this speech, President Fonseca’s censorship of the rebels’ communiqués had left carioca journalists and the general public largely ignorant of the motives behind the revolt. Unsurprisingly, Carvalho’s former colleagues in the armed forces were incensed with his role as lead negotiator during the revolt. One high-ranking naval official called Carvalho a “traitor” for having “had no shame in shaking the hands of the assassins of his comrades.” That a prominent politician and former naval commander was willing not only to hear the rebels’ claims, but to convey them directly to the country’s most powerful politicians, lent much credence to the reclamantes’ movement.

Carvalho also furthered the cause of the rebels by openly praising their order and their potential for damage to the city. At the start of the revolt, Carvalho noted, Cândido had ordered all of the liquor thrown overboard, and he had declared and strictly enforced that none of his men invade the officers’ quarters. More ominously, Carvalho noted that all of the ships’ artillery was fully

55 *Annães do Câmara*, Vol. 8, 454. “Navios poderosos como estes não podem ser tratados e conservados pela meia dúzia de marinheiros que estão a bordo; o trabalho é redobrado, a alimentação é pésima e malfeita, e os castigos aumentam desbragadamente. Estamos em um verdadeiro momento de desespero: sem comida, muito trabalho, e nossas costas rasgadas pelos castigos corporais, que chegam à crueldade.”

56 *Annães do Câmara*, Vol. 8, 455. A mullet is a type of freshwater fish. “Sr. Presidente, as costas desse marinheiro assemelham-se a uma tainha lanhada para ser salgada.”

functioning. Whether consciously or not, the Deputy somewhat exaggerated the danger that the reclamantes posed to the city. For instance, contrary to reports that the rebels were fully armed, the large cannons on the São Paulo were not functioning throughout the revolt; they had been flooded with salt water. Moreover, Carvalho greatly overstated the rebels’ strength; the Deputy stated that all of the ships in the Brazilian Navy were loyal to Cândido, including the torpedo boats - an outlandish assertion given that even the reclamantes never claimed this throughout the revolt.

Why Carvalho took such liberties in his speech remains unclear, but regardless, he made his sympathies towards the rebels evident enough. He concluded his speech by stating grimly to his fellow Congressmen that, “The men on board are capable of anything…” Given the nature of his mission, the Deputy frankly admitted that he was not assigned the task to assess the viability of a possible military response. Nevertheless, by broadcasting the demands of the reclamantes and praising their strong organization, Deputy Carvalho did much to shift attitudes among Brazilian politicians from a military counterattack to a negotiated amnesty in Congress.

Senator Rui Barbosa and the Debate Over Amnesty

Given the serious nature of the threat from the reclamantes, the two houses of the Brazilian National Congress – the Senate and the House of Deputies – each held emergency sessions from November 23 to 25 to pursue a political resolution to the revolt. During these three days of tense political negotiations, Senator Rui Barbosa successfully piloted a bill through Congress that granted the rebels amnesty. Throughout these debates, Brazilian Congressmen overwhelmingly interpreted the naval revolt in two ways: first, as a continuation of the 1910 bitter Presidential election between

---

58 Annães do Câmara, Vol. 8, 456.
60 Annães do Câmara dos Deputados, vol. 8, 456.
61 Annães do Câmara, Vol. 8, 456. “A gente que está a bordo é capaz de tudo…”
Fonseca’s *hermistas* and Barbosa’s *civilistas* (and the corresponding debate between military versus civilian rule); and second, as a challenge to Brazil’s status as a “civilized” nation.

Fresh from his loss to Fonseca, Senator Rui Barbosa rallied support in the Senate for a negotiated settlement with the *reclamantes*. In a series of eloquent speeches on November 23 and 24, the senator spearheaded the push to grant the sailors amnesty and recognize their demands. With the *reclamantes* training scores of massive guns on the capital, the stakes of these debates could not have been higher. The plight of Brazilian sailors was no longer merely an issue for the navy, but one of urgent political importance for the capital and all of Brazil.

Barbosa began his extensive speech on November 23 by echoing themes from the *campanha civilista*. Before discussing the possible responses to the revolt, Barbosa outlined his view of the proper place for the military in Brazilian politics:

> The navy and army are for us [*civilistas*] two respectable bodies within the law, which limits their orbit within the Constitution and that imposes on them this inviolable subordination to Constitutional Power. That is the great expression of *civilismo*…the maintenance of the armed forces within the insuperable circle of legality.63

In this remark, Barbosa left little doubt about his attitude towards the military as subordinate to civilian rule. This sweeping statement hardly could have pleased Fonseca or his *hermista* allies, who defined their politics with regard to the armed forces.

Barbosa then professed his support of the *reclamantes’* revolt. Defending some of the country’s most oppressed and – at the time – dangerous men was a precarious position for the senator to take. He argued that the *reclamantes’* actions were not politically motivated, but were founded on a morally just cause: the abolition of corporal punishment. Moreover, this claim had legal grounding – the senator noted that the *chibata* had twice been banned in the navy in 1824 and

---

1889, but officers regularly continued to employ the whip.64 “We must…not forget the truth and justice that lies at the heart of these claims,” he urged his fellow senators.65 Barbosa praised the reclamantes for the orderly and dignified manner in which they had carried out their insurrection, noting that leader João Cândido had ordered all of the alcohol thrown overboard, that the mutineers had maintained strict discipline, and had consciously chosen not to inflict serious damage on the capital.66 Citing Deputy Carvalho’s testimony in the Chamber of Deputies as proof, Barbosa proclaimed, “Gentleman, this is an honest revolution!”67

To Barbosa, use of the chibata was incompatible with a modern Brazil. The fact that Brazilian naval officers whipped and overworked their enlisted sailors, Barbosa argued, represented “an offense against one of the principles of humanity that civilized nations most impose upon themselves…” – a direct reference to the fact that all navies in the North Atlantic had abolished corporal punishment decades earlier.68 “Our country’s civilization demands another system to educate our men of war,” Barbosa stated on November 24.69 This statement directly echoed his campaign speeches earlier that year in which he exhorted military leaders to grant their enlisted men “schooling, moral education, and higher wages.”70

Senator Barbosa was well aware that not all of his fellow Senators – particularly those supportive of President Fonseca and the armed forces – would accept his liberal justifications for amnesty and the abolition of corporal punishment. Thus, he presented several more pragmatic justifications to resolve the revolt through political means. First, Barbosa argued that the ships

64 Barbosa, OCRB 1910, 136.
65 Barbosa, OCRB 1910, 127. “É preço [sic], porem, não esquecer a verdade e a justiça que jazem no fundo intimo dessas reclamações.”
66 Barbosa, OCRB 1910, 134-35.
67 Barbosa, OCRB 1910, 134. “Senhores, isto é uma revolução honesta!”
68 Barbosa, OCRB 1910, 128. “…é ofender um dos princípios de humanidade que mais se impõem aos paizes civilizados…”
69 Barbosa, OCRB 1910, 136. “Era necessário que não se continuasse a esquecer que o marinheiro e o soldado são homens….A civilização do nosso paiz reclama um outro sistema para educação dos nossos homens de Guerra…”
70 Rui Barbosa, “Plataforma,” in Obras Completas (Bahia: n.p., 1910), 75, 77. “1o) a escola; 2o) a cultura moral; 3o) o aumento do soldo…”
commandeered by the *reclamantes*, particularly the dreadnoughts *São Paulo* and *Minas Gerais*, represented too great a national investment to destroy.\(^{71}\) Even if the government did attack these valuable ships, Barbosa posited, such an attack would fail; after all, he noted, they had been bought precisely because they were “insuperable” weapons of war.\(^{72}\) The senator further argued that the government did not even hold the legal authority to attack the rebels, since doing so would risk a bombardment of Rio de Janeiro and endanger its population.\(^{73}\)

In sum, on November 23 and 24, Barbosa presented an overwhelming case to grant amnesty to the sailors and abolish corporal punishment in the Brazilian Navy. By grounding his arguments in *civílista* rhetoric from his Presidential campaign and modernizing terms, he struck a blow against President Fonseca and the military interests in the Brazilian government. Yet Barbosa also presented several more pragmatic reasons for amnesty and the abolition of the *chibata*, reasons designed to appeal to his political and ideological opponents. During these two days, Senator Barbosa rallied strong support in the Senate for the *reclamantes*. By November 24, the Brazilian press had begun to sympathize with them as well.\(^{74}\)

Given the government’s bumbling attempts to muster a counterattack and Senator Barbosa’s effective arguments in support of amnesty, it appeared that the revolt would be resolved quickly and peacefully through political means. On the afternoon of November 24, however, Senator Pinheiro Machado challenged Barbosa’s amnesty plan. Though he largely agreed with Barbosa, Machado

---

\(^{71}\) Barbosa, *OCRB 1910*, 126.

\(^{72}\) Barbosa, *OCRB 1910*, 133-34. “São inexpugnáveis…”

\(^{73}\) Barbosa, *OCRB 1910*, 137. In a particularly intriguing remark also on November 24, Barbosa stated, “We extinguished slavery over the black race; however, we have maintained slavery over the white race in the army and navy.” Given that approximately 90% of enlisted men in the Brazilian navy were Afro-Brazilian, it appears that this statement was another of Barbosa’s attempts to pander to those Senators less compelled by his liberal, rights-based rhetoric. As Zachary Morgan argues, such men would have been far more offended by the fact that whites were being brutalized in the navy, as opposed to blacks, who were ostensibly “already used to such treatment.” Barbosa, *OCRB 1910*, 136. “Extinguimos a escravidão sobre a raça negra; mantemos, porem, a escravidão da raça branca no Exercito e na Armada…” Morgan, “Legacy of the Lash,” 217.

\(^{74}\) For a detailed analysis of the Brazilian and international press coverage of the *Revolta da Chibata*, see pages 95-100.
opposed his fellow senator’s proposed amnesty to the rebels before they had surrendered their weapons.

Senator Machado was as powerful as any politician of the period; he had represented his state of Rio Grande do Sul in Congress since 1889, and he had played a crucial role in delivering votes to Fonseca in the 1910 election. According to one historian, Machado was the “main arbiter of Brazilian politics” in the two decades since the founding of the Republic.\(^75\) Machado had played a crucial role in orchestrating Fonseca’s victory in the 1910 election. Moreover, the senator was a staunch supporter of the Fonseca regime and had even participated in a private meeting with the president and his cabinet on the morning of November 24.\(^76\) The senator also played the essential role of nominating José Carlos de Carvalho for the tense negotiations with the reclamantes. Machado’s close alliance with Fonseca provides an insight into the president’s own reactions to the revolt during this particular period; indeed, it is not an exaggeration to say that Senator Machado served in part as the president’s spokesperson during this debate. Given the fact that Machado had nominated Deputy Carvalho as head negotiator, and also played an influential role in the Senate’s discussions over amnesty, he arguably played a more influential role in determining the early political response to the revolt than President Fonseca himself.

In challenging Barbosa’s push for unconditional amnesty, Machado first acknowledged that the reclamantes had justifiable complaints:

[W]e all tend to believe in the justness of the claims that caused it [the revolt]: scarce food, excessive work, [and] corporal punishment, none of which are any longer compatible with our liberal regime, with the law, nor with the current civilization and democratic culture for which we have been striving.\(^77\)


\(^{76}\) Carvalho, *O Livro da Minha Vida*, 364.

In the context of the push to modernize Brazil, Machado made a strikingly similar argument to that which Barbosa had advanced earlier in the debates, and his summary of the rebels’ claims was even more succinct and accurate than Barbosa’s.

Yet despite his sympathy for the plight of the reclamantes, Machado also held serious reservations about Barbosa’s proposal for immediate amnesty. At the core of this argument was his conviction that making any concessions under coercion would undermine the very political order that was integral to maintain the Republic and modernize the nation. “Though these claims may be just,” he stated, “they [the rebels] are making them with cannons aimed at the city. [Applause] The public powers are in a situation of coercion.” As such, Machado argued, it was neither moral nor rational for the National Congress to deliver a verdict on such a pressing issue until the rebels had relinquished their arms. Only then, the senator argued, could Congress grant them amnesty and realistically assess their claims. If the reclamantes did not pursue this route, he proposed, the government should not ignore the possibility of an armed response. By rejecting the idea of granting amnesty to the rebels before they had surrendered, Senator Machado spoke for many other political and military supporters of President Fonseca.

Barbosa and Machado debated back and forth throughout the afternoon of November 24 on whether or not the rebels should surrender before amnesty was granted. After several hours, with no resolution in sight, they had debated to a standstill. At 3:40 p.m., however, the Minas Gerais sent a telegram to the president and to the Senate that significantly altered the nature of the debate. It read:

“His Excellency, Marshal Hermes da Fonseca, President of the Republic – Repenting for the action that we took in our defense, for love of order, of justice and of liberty, we lay down our arms, trusting that amnesty will be granted to us by the National Congress, abolishing corporal punishment as the law commands and increasing the salary and the personnel so that naval service may be done without our

---

78 Annães do Senado Federal, vol. 5, 140. “Por mais justas que sejam... as reclamações dos revoltosos, elles as fazem com os canhões assestados sobre esta cidade. (Apoiaos) Os poderes publicos estão em uma situação de coacção.”
79 Estudo de São Paulo, 26 November 1910, 6.
80 Estudo de São Paulo, 26 November 1910, 6.
sacrifice. We will remain on board obedient to the orders of Your Excellency, in whom we trust completely. We also wait equally for the generosity of our pardon. All of this having been resolved under the word of the dignified deputy, José Carlos de Carvalho.

"The Reclamantes"81

Notably, this telegram represented the first, and indeed the only time throughout their siege that the reclamantes offered to relinquish their weapons before their demands had been met. After the telegram was disseminated throughout the Senate, the tone of the debate changed immediately. Upon seeing the message, Senator Machado announced, “We can now, without the specter of terror, vote for the [amnesty] project, certain that we are deliberating freely…”82 Directly thereafter, President Fonseca called for a vote. Unsurprisingly, given this timely telegram, the measure passed unanimously, 34 votes to 0. The vote would turn over to the Chamber of Deputies for ratification the following day.

In light of the conciliatory message from the reclamantes, Fonseca and the Brazilian government now had a more respectable justification for amnesty. Recall that, on the night of November 22, Minister Leão had responded to the rebels’ initial telegram by stating that their demands could “‘only be addressed when made with deference and respect to the constitutional powers.’”83 In the communications and debates that followed, Fonseca had continued to take the

---

81 Jornal do Comércio, 25 November 1910, 3 and O Paiz, 25 November 1910, 1. The rebels actually sent two nearly identical telegrams on the afternoon of November 24; the first to President Fonseca and the second to the Senate. The telegrams differed slightly, as the second included the two final sentences (beginning with “We also wait equally…”). All other sources quoting the first telegram omit the crucial final two lines. Among these sources are Nascimento, “Do convés ao porto,” 35; Morgan, “Legacy of the Lash,” pp. 240-41; Hermes da Fonseca Filho, Marechal Hermes, 142; and Martins, A revolta dos marinheiros, 113. “Exmo. Sr. Marechal Hermes da Fonseca, Presidente da República – Arrependidos do acto que praticámos em nossa defesa por amor da ordem, da justiça e da liberdade. Depomos as armas, confiando que nos seja concedida amnistia pelo Congresso Nacional, abolido como manda a lei o castigo corporal e aumentando o ordenado e o pessoal para que o serviço do bordo possa ser feito sem o nosso sacrifício. Ficamos a bordo obedientes às ordens de V. Ex. em quem tudo confiamos. Esperamos igualmente a generosidade do nosso perdão. Tudo isto resolvido sob a palavra do digno deputado José Carlos de Carvalho – Os Reclamantes.”
82 Annães do Senado Federal, vol. 5, 157. “Podemos, pois, sem a sombra do terror…votar pelo projecto, certo de que estamos deliberando livremente…”
83 Qtd. by Martins, A revolta dos marinheiros, 22.
rigid approach of refusing to grant any of the rebels’ demands so long as they remained armed.\textsuperscript{84}

Now, thanks to this convenient telegram, Fonseca did not have to alter his stance on amnesty in order for the project to pass. Similarly, the telegram allowed Senator Machado to save face; he could now support amnesty without changing his own similar arguments.

Given the circumstances surrounding this telegram – its shift in rhetoric, its fortuitous timing, and the crucial role that it played in resolving the debate between Senators Barbosa and Machado and allowing amnesty to pass – several historians have speculated that it was forged by elements within the Fonseca government. While this theory holds some logic, a closer analysis of the chronology on November 24 and motivations of President Fonseca during this period reveals that this was probably not the case. Rather, it is highly likely that the reclamantes on board the Minas Gerais drafted a highly conciliatory message this afternoon with the direct assistance of Deputy Carvalho, who was visiting the ships during this time. Carvalho would have been acutely aware of the time pressures that the senators faced in passing amnesty, and he had already established a strong rapport with the reclamantes the previous day. Moreover, as subsequent events would reveal, a speedy and peaceful amnesty resolution was hardly the goal that President Fonseca and Minister Leão desired at this point.\textsuperscript{85}

President Fonseca’s Last Gasp Effort at a Counterattack

In the early hours of November 25, President Fonseca unexpectedly pursued an all-out military counterattack against the reclamantes. Up to that point, Fonseca had publicly maintained distance from any specific response to the revolt, having refused to endorse either Deputy Carvalho’s negotiations or Minister Leão’s actions towards a military response. By November 25, two of Leão’s major preliminary measures against the rebels – mining the entrance to Guanabara


\textsuperscript{85} For a detailed analysis of the historiographical controversy surrounding this telegram, see Appendix A, page 140.
Bay and obtaining an arsenal of torpedoes – had failed. The rebels still held an advantage over the government forces in terms of firepower and military organization. They also now enjoyed the support of the carioca press, the National Congress, and much of the population of Rio de Janeiro.

In spite of these overwhelming odds, President Fonseca remained fixated on defeating the reclamantes through military means. Many military leaders felt that they had been doubly betrayed – first by the rebels, who had overthrown and killed their officers and seized control of the crown jewels of the new Brazilian navy, and second, by the Brazilian press and National Congress, who both supported these treacherous men and portrayed naval officers as cruel and incompetent. These men believed that the only way to regain their lost prestige was through a military counterattack.86

Lieutenant Américo Salles de Carvalho was one of those who urged the president not to accept amnesty. “It is cowardice,” he said of the Congressional measure, “to which a marshal’s forces should not lower themselves by sanctioning.”87 Given that the Senate had passed amnesty unanimously on November 24, the Chamber of Deputies was widely expected to pass the measure the following afternoon. Thus, if the government sought to respond to the revolt with force, November 25 would be the last possible day for a coordinated military counterattack.

In his 1911 official naval report to the president, Minister Leão recounts Fonseca’s sudden shift: “You resolved to attack the rebels with all of the forces of land and sea at the government’s disposal, at 2:00 a.m. on the 25th, I received the order to make all arrangements towards that objective.”88 Given the sheer power of the rebellious ships, Minister Leão decided that a torpedo attack was the only feasible way to defeat the reclamantes – this despite the fact that the government had less than a dozen torpedoes in its possession. His plans called for a “suicide flotilla,” composed

88 Leão, Relatório, 12. “Resolvido por vós o ataque aos revoltosos, por parte de todas as forças de terra e mar de que dispunha o Governo, pelas duas horas da manhã de 25 recebi ordem para tudo dispor com esse objectivo.”
of eight destroyers and the light cruiser Rio Grande do Sul, to attack the rebels immediately. In a privately issued memo, Leão called his naval officers to arms with an infamous “blank letter”:

“The Minister of the Navy, on behalf of ________________, orders that the Commander of ________________ attack the rebellious ships with the utmost energy, sinking them no matter what the sacrifice…

-Joaquim Marques Batista de Leão”

After having been marginalized for two days while negotiated settlement unfolded, the Brazilian armed forces could finally engage the rebels in combat.

What motivated President Fonseca to order Minister Leão to attack the rebels after having postponed this decision for over fifty hours? Though his motivations were undoubtedly complex, it appears that the president was principally concerned with projecting an image of a powerful federal government to the rest of the country and the world. By acquiescing to the demands of an oppressed and disenfranchised population, Fonseca risked damaging Brazil’s image in the eyes of his political rivals and the “civilized” countries of Europe and the United States. As historian Alvaro Nascimento notes, “were [Fonseca] to accept all of the rebels’ claims, his government could fall into complete discredit before having even completing ten days in office.” Indeed, as Nascimento adds, if the rebellious sailors were to gain amnesty, what would keep other similarly discontented groups in Brazil from uprising as well?

Given the overwhelming importance during this period of projecting a modern and orderly image of Brazil to the world, President Fonseca undoubtedly felt enormous pressure to pursue a military reaction, however unreasonable or dangerous it might have been.

---

89 Da Cunha, A revolta na esquadra brasileira, 37-38.
90 Da Cunha, A revolta na esquadra brasileira, 39 reprints a facsimile of the original document. “O Ministro da Marinha por intermédio do ___________ ordena, que o Comandante de ____________ hostilise com a maxima energia aos navios revoltados, metendo-os à pique sem medir qualquer sacrifício…”
91 Nascimento, “Do convés ao porto,” 34-35. “Caso aceitasse todas as reivindicações dos amotinados seu governo poderia cair no descrédito de todos antes de completar dez dias de vida.”
Having resolved to engage the rebels in combat, Fonseca allowed these plans to be made public. On the morning of November 25, the Rio paper *A Imprensa* published the following statement:

“General Menna Barreto has declared…that bombardment will begin as soon as the rebellious ships have been sighted. The bombardment of the city by the rebels may follow. Combat is imminent. Bombardment will probably follow. *A Imprensa* advises the population to withdraw.”

Several other *carioca* dailies published similar warnings during this period. The Chief of Police and Mayor of Rio de Janeiro also issued an official statement on behalf of President Fonseca asserting that, unless the rebels surrendered immediately, the government forces would commence bombing them.

To the population of Rio de Janeiro, these developments came as an abrupt shock. Up to this point, Deputy Carvalho’s negotiations with the rebels and Barbosa’s efforts towards amnesty in the Senate had led most people to expect a peaceful resolution to the revolt. With a siege of the city imminent, a general panic swept throughout Rio de Janeiro once again, this time even more frenzied than the panic that had marked start of the revolt on November 23. According to the *Jornal do Comércio*, the news of a government counterattack set off “a note of extreme terror” throughout the city and prompted another “feverish exodus” of the population to the suburbs. Once more, thousands of people, including entire families, fled the city; the wealthy packed into trains, carriages, wagons and cars, while the poor simply ran with whatever they could carry.

The rebels, too, were shocked by Fonseca’s sudden departure from a peaceful settlement. Almost immediately, they sent a response to the government: “We do not want to hurt anyone,

---


however, we no longer want the *chibata.*”\(^{95}\) In order to ensure that unnecessary hostilities did not break out, the *São Paulo* also sent a brief telegram to the *Minas Gerais*: “Stay calm.”\(^{96}\)

**Tensions Defused and Amnesty Passed**

Just when the Fonseca government was finally fully mobilized to attack the *reclamantes*, however, they disappeared. After leaving the bay for the high seas on the night of November 24, the rebels remained there until the late afternoon the following day, making the government’s planned counterattack impossible. As Minister Leão wrote in his annual report, “The rebels did not return to the port that morning [November 25], and by the time they did pass by the mainland forts that afternoon [at 4:00 p.m.], the amnesty project was already well underway, and the order to attack was definitively revoked.”\(^{97}\)

Evidence suggests that the *reclamantes* were alerted of the government’s plan to attack sometime on November 24. That evening, the crew of the destroyer-torpedo boat *Timbira* – which had remained passively supportive of the *reclamantes* – sent a crucial telegram to João Cândido aboard the *Minas Gerais*. “Be careful tonight. The destroyers are going to attack!”\(^{98}\) Deputy Carvalho may have attempted to subtly warn the *reclamantes* as well. On the evening of November 24, he wrote them the following telegram. “The Senate has passed amnesty, The Chamber of Deputies will vote tomorrow. Trust in the president of the Republic. Any carelessness could be dangerous.”\(^{99}\) Though this message was not an overt warning, it nonetheless may have alerted the rebels that an attack was

---

95 Morel, *A Revolta da Chibata*, 88, Não queremos fazer mal a ninguém, porém, não queremos mais a chibata.”
97 Leão, *Relatório*, 13. “Os revoltosos não entraram no porta essa manhã, e quando, no correr do dia transpuzeram as fortalezas da barra, já encontraram activado o andamento do projecto de amnistia e definitivamente revogada a ordem de ataque que a principio só fora sustada.”
coming. As a result of this information, the reclamantes thwarted the government’s one opportunity for a military counteroffensive.

By midafternoon on November 25, it had become clear that the government would be unable to attack the reclamantes before amnesty was passed. This fact, coupled with the chaos resulting from the government’s aggressive measures, prompted Fonseca to rescind the aggressive statements that he had disseminated earlier that day. Just before 12:00 noon, the Chief of Police issued the following notice on behalf of the president:

“The government has absolutely no plans to initiate bombing against the rebellious ships, and thus does not authorize the statement made in bulletins distributed this morning…thus, it is proper to wait for the resolution currently being pursued in Congress. There is no reason, therefore, for the unusual panic that has developed in the heart of the alarmed population…”

Fonseca emerged from this debacle with a doubly tarnished image; not only was the Federal government forced to accept the amnesty, which Fonseca and many others saw as shameful, but in light of its vacillations on November 25, the government also appeared weak and indecisive.

Could the loyal forces have vanquished the rebellious ships in open combat? Reliable historians of the revolt concur that the reclamantes almost undoubtedly would have emerged victorious. Morel, who sympathizes with the rebels, asserts that any open combat would have resulted in an “unequal battle, with the absolute advantage going to the dreadnoughts.” Vice-Admiral Martins, the official naval historian of the revolt, begrudgingly arrives at the same conclusion. He calls Minister Leão’s plan of attack “incontestably good, audacious, [and] led under

---

100 O Correio da Manhã, 26 November 1910, 1-2. “…O governo não tenciona absolutamente iniciar bombardeio contra os navios revoltados e, pois, não autoriza a afirmação feita em boletins distribuídos esta manhã… Esse seu modo de ver tanto mais se justifica quanto é certo que aguarda a solução que ao caso procura dar o Congresso Nacional. Não existe, portanto, razão para o desusado pânico que se estabeceu no seio da população alarmada pela injustificada iminência de acontecimentos graves…”

the most favorable conditions,” but Martins too acknowledges that, realistically, it had “a small possibility of success.”

With Fonseca’s public statement midday on November 25, the government’s abortive attempts to attack the rebels came to an end. The reclamantes remained on the high seas for the remainder of the amnesty process, communicating almost continuously with José Carlos de Carvalho via telegraph to gather updates. By 4:00 p.m. that day, the Chamber of Deputies passed amnesty by a vote of 125 to 23, sending the project to President Fonseca for ratification. At this point, the president was powerless – his military counterstrike had failed, and if he vetoed the project, Congress could have easily overridden his veto. After holding out for several hours, Fonseca finally signed the project into law at 7:20 p.m. that evening, formally ending hostilities between the government and the rebels less than 72 hours after the revolt had begun. In a statement he made along with this act, Fonseca cited the November 24 telegram, in which the rebels had proposed to lay down their arms before gaining amnesty, as his rationale for signing the law – a rather transparent effort to restore at least some dignity to the executive office.

Having officially gained amnesty from Congress, the reclamantes once again exited Guanabara Bay on the evening of November 25. Many of the rebels were reluctant to surrender given that the government still had not guaranteed any of their major demands, including those for new officers, increased wages, and the abolition of corporal punishment. On board several of the ships, particularly the Deodoro, debates raged well into the night. For the first time during the revolt, the reclamantes were divided over their plan of action.

104 Fonseca Filho, Marechal Hermes, 145.
106 These debates are covered extensively in Benedito Paulo [Adão Manuel Pereira Nunes], A Revolta de João Cândido. (Porto Alegre: Independência, 1934). The document is housed at BM; the author thanks Zachary Morgan for making photocopies of this work available. Nunes’s work is reviewed extensively by Morgan, “Legacy of the Lash,” 233-237 and
In their communications with Carvalho, the rebels had resolved to return the ships at 12:00 noon on November 26. The time came and went, however, and the ships remained at sea, still flying their red flags of rebellion.\footnote{José Miguel Arias Neto, “Em busca da cidadania: Praças da Armada Nacional 1867-1910,” Ph.D. diss. (Universidade de São Paulo, 2001), 275-276, 292-295.} At 2:00 p.m., the reclamantes reappeared, demanding further assurances from the government before they would end the revolt. For the next four hours, leaders from all four ships spoke extensively on board the Minas Gerais with the fleet commander of the Brazilian Navy, João Pereira Leite.\footnote{The São Paulo and Bahia entered Guanabara Bay briefly on the morning of November 26 to requisition fresh water, purportedly so that the sailors could bathe. After obtaining this water, the two ships then promptly returned to the high seas. Morgan, “Legacy of the Lash,” 235.} Though still apprehensive about whether their demands would be met, the reclamantes finally relinquished control of their four ships, the Minas Gerais, São Paulo, Deodoro and Bahia, in the late afternoon of November 26, nearly 24 hours after Fonseca had ratified the amnesty.\footnote{Nunes, A Revolta de João Cândido, 42-43, 48-49. The Portuguese term for fleet commander is Capitão de Mar e Guerra.}

After four full days of tense negotiations and near-conflicts, the Revolta da Chibata had come to an end. For the time being, at least, the reclamantes appeared to have successfully lobbied the Brazilian government for improved rights in the Brazilian Navy. As the subsequent days would reveal, Fonseca and his military advisers were not content to allow these reforms to last for long.

\footnote{For a photograph of the reclamantes on board the Minas Gerais (including João Cândido) turning the boats over to naval authorities, see Image 9 in Appendix B, page 154.}