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COOPERATIVISM IN THE WEST OF PAULISTA AND THE GERMAN INFLUENCE: THE COOPERATIVA RIOGRANDENSE AND THE REGIONAL TRANSFORMATIONS

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Abstract: The expansion of railroads in the State of São Paulo allowed the development of cities along its route. As it is a region of recent settlement, Alta Sorocabana de Assis has, since its foundation, largely depended on agriculture and logging services for the maintenance of the Sorocabana Railroad. After the founding of the city of Assis in 1905, new towns emerged and later achieved their political-administrative emancipation, giving rise to smaller municipalities. The presence of small landowners in the study region made agriculture their main source of livelihood. The article seeks to explain the movement around cooperative work and the initiative of the first settlers in facing a new natural environment. In 1939, the first works began that would later form the basis for the future Cooperativa Mista da Colônia Riograndense, idealized by Michel Lamb, who had just arrived from Rio Grande do Sul in 1922. The cooperative work was important for the first German immigrants to be able to start the transformation of the forest exercising a culture focused on its subsistence. In the 1970s, there was a shift towards crops of high commercial value, with a direct impact on the growth and consolidation of the Cooperative. **Keywords:** Immigration 1. Cooperative 2. Region 3.

INTRODUCTION

This article was developed as part of research seeking to understand cooperativism in its regional dimension. This study generally involves the immigration process with the arrival of Germans and later Italians to the region known as Alta Sorocabana de Assis.

There is interest in analyzing how the presence of immigrants and the birth of cooperatives developed as part of a process of change inserted by the penetration of capitalist relations in Brazilian agriculture, especially in the 1960s and 1970s.

The study is part of a broader research also focusing on the origins of Brazilian cooperativism and its development in the São Paulo context.

In the specific case of Colônia Riograndense, its process of foundation and affirmation as a space marked by the presence of German descendants originated in the gradual occupation of groups from the south of Brazil and from countries such as Germany and Switzerland, as well as other regions such as Espírito Santo.

Some authors had already specifically studied the Cooperativa Riograndense with contributions from Geography emphasizing land occupation and spatial changes, fruits of human action. Felix's notes on the linguistic issue and acculturation issues were also essential to understand how German families were organized and lived together in a new context at first.

Land transformation activities and the start of plantations presented a high degree of difficulty for the first inhabitants in a region where there was a predominance of small and medium-sized properties.

After the emergence of the first houses and the need for unity to overcome the great difficulties that arose, they were catalysts for cooperative work that brought affirmation and prosperity to the settlers who resisted and stayed in the region, also contributing to a new conformation of activities. economic, social and political.

A COOPERATIVE OF GERMAN IMMIGRANTS

The Cooperativa Agrícola Mista da Colônia Riograndense had its foundation linked to the first colonization movements originated by Michel Lamb who bought land from Cupertino de Castro, representative of a company specialized in the clearing of the region where the municipality of Maracá is

located. During this period, the companies responsible for the sale of land proliferated not only in the aforementioned region but also towards Presidente Prudente and the extreme west of São Paulo.

The allotted area belonged to the Capivara farm owned by Captain Alfredo Marcondes de Oliveira, who bought it from the successors of José Teodoro de Souza, a pioneer of land in western São Paulo. Antunes was from the city of Guaratinguetá in the Paraíba River valley and entrusted his nephew Cupertino Oliveira de Castro with managing the businesses and the sale of land to German immigrants.

Captain Antunes signed with the Germans Otto Iserhagem and Júlio Malves a promissory contract of sale and purchase and subdivision of almost half of the farm. Cupertino, his nephew would be the business manager of the farm itself. The contract was supposed to last 2 years. The deal with the Germans was carried out and the lots sold in the south of Brazil, in Espírito Santo and even in Germany. The real estate sellers owned the company Isernhagem & Cia. Since then, the embryo of a colony of German immigrants and migrants was formed". (FELIX, 1990, p.32)

The negotiation of the lands was mediated by a German immigrant from Rio Grande do Sul, Michel Lamb, who was one of the pioneers of the then colony that was beginning to form. This was one of the characteristics of Colonia Riograndense: its spontaneity. It was not sponsored by any government agency. It did not go through a planning process nor was it guided by the authorities at the time. The formation of such a colony owes more to the initiative of a large landowner who divided up his land and later sold it to immigrants who were interested in populating the area.

Michel Lamb settled in "Água do Macaco" after returning from Rio Grande do Sul, on August 28, 1922. From 1923, new groups of farmers and pioneers began to arrive in the

region, coming from Espírito Santo, from the Southern Region and other Brazilian states.

"The first crops cultivated and harvested by the pioneer settlers were cassava, maize and beans. But there was the big problem with the commercialization of crops. And that's when the idea of founding a cooperative came up, which ended up coming true five years after the death of Michel Lamb, who was a bulwark in the establishment and well-being of the families that arrived here, as well as a precursor to the progress of the future Colonia Riograndense". (Special Magazine for the Foundation of the Mixed Agricultural Cooperative of Colônia Riograndense, 1989, p.7)

Lamb had already realized the importance of associative activities but died before putting his plan into practice. In 1939, a group of thirteen settlers founded the Cooperativa Teuto-Brasileira and in this was Gustavo Balduino, Lamb's brother who became the first president of the cooperative that was being born.

In 1930, some producers started raising pigs, obtaining satisfactory results with commercialization in the city of Assis and in the district of Cardoso de Almeida, seeking to sell their product in the city of São Paulo.

The Teuto-Brasileira cooperative was founded with the objective of making the production commercialization work feasible, distributing the result to its associates. It also brought together the first settlers around the clearing and transformation of the region.

"The same denomination was maintained until 1945, when the company name was changed to Cooperativa Mista de Assis Ltd, equipped with an office, warehouse and railroad diversion to speed up the flow of production. At that time, there were 350 families from Rio Grande do Sul, Espírito Santo, Switzerland and Germany, responsible for the annual production and sale of 6,000 head of pigs, in addition to several tons of alfalfa". (Special Magazine for the Foundation of the Mixed Agricultural Cooperative of

Between 1956 and 1964 the first market was built, aiming to supply the members, as well as the first house that housed the manager's family. Although this market was aimed at the consumption of members of the colony, it appeared as an indicator of the capitalization process present in the region, which still had an incipient settlement.

The mechanization of the cooperative that was being structured began with the arrival of the first tractors and trucks, necessitating the installation of a fuel station in the area where the activities had intense movement. Due to the high traffic of tractors and trucks during the harvest season and the need to transport to consumer centers, obtaining autonomy in order to supply has become an imperative to be followed.

In 1964, there was a new change in the name of the cooperative, which was renamed "Cooperativa Agrícola Mista da Colônia Riograndense". The president in front of him was Alberto Scherr.

The occupation process of the area where Cooperativa Riograndense is located was slow and difficult. Many settlers died in the conquest and treatment of the soil due to diseases transmitted by mosquitoes (such as yellow fever) and other types of insects. As this sector of the Paranapanema Valley had a dense forest, the difficulties encountered by the immigrants were constant.

The problems of occupying the newly conquered space were already felt on the arrival of the immigrant who only had his family, having little relationship with the neighborhood that was also settling in the place. The construction of the first "ranches" was carried out in the big group of people system among the pioneer residents.

The newcomer needed to shelter his family as quickly as possible, guaranteeing him safety and the possibility of being able to count on

one more, in the tasks of life in the distant hinterland, as well as instinctively the "need for social interaction". (ABIB, 1991, p.16)

Clearing the forest was a major obstacle for the newly arrived Germans. The representative of a colonization company, Cupertino de Castro, was the one who made the connection between the immigrant not yet accustomed to the new conditions he would face, with the caboclos of the region.

The pioneering movements to occupy the land where the Riograndense Colony would be installed took place from 1920 onwards. The settler's concern during this period was to secure the land by building houses, since their work was directly linked to farming and other activities in the primary sector. The fixation in the place indicated the ownership of the land in the initial movements of settlement of the region studied.

Once the clearing and the path were opened, that work contract ended. The construction of the house and other dependencies was now the responsibility of the settler and his family. The money he brought was next to nothing. He couldn't afford to pay contractors to help with other tasks. (ABIB, 1991, p. 161)

The problems faced by the agricultural immigrants, such as pests in the plantation, added to the difficulty in acquiring seeds, agricultural tools and other products related to farming activities, were factors that accelerated the introduction of cooperative practices. The high cost of purchasing agricultural implements also constituted initial difficulties for farmers.

"Pests and diseases common to activities carried out at the time led to the search for new options, and Riograndense associates began growing cotton on a commercial scale. This culture, however, did not resist the intense attacks of pests, which in 1968 and 1969 reached unbearable limits". (Report: Cooperativa Mista Colônia Riograndense, 1981-1983. p.3)

Immigrants also brought a cultural heritage inherited from their ancestors in Europe, where cooperativism was widely developed. The difficulties encountered in 1920 contributed decisively to the first movements in favor of the creation of a cooperative in 1939.

“Cooperativa Riograndense then emerged as a possible solution, as a privileged space for the reproduction of various groups of planters, depending on its objective, providing its members with certain goods and services in a democratic organizational model. These give the cooperative a specific and new character in the Paranapanema Valley”. (ABIB, 1991, p. 178)

The first agricultural activities of Colonia Riograndense aimed only at production aimed at the farmers' own consumption. The idea of selling the main products developed gradually.

These immigrants who started the settlement of the colony in 1920 arrived in the Paranapanema Valley from different regions as in the case of Ernest Wrede who was part of the administration in the early years of the Cooperativa Teuto-Brasileira founded in 1939.

“Mr. Ernesto Wrede was born in Santa Jetiba, in Espírito Santo, where he was born in 1907, and came to Colonia Riograndense with his parents Henrich in 1925, arriving by train to Cardoso de Almeida and then on foot to Maracaí and to the future Colonia Riograndense. With his father he helped build the house on the Espírito Santo farm where he lived until he died”. (Special Magazine for the Foundation of the Mixed Agricultural Cooperative of Colônia Riograndense, 1989, p.7)

Alfalfa was one of the products traded in Colonia Riograndense and of greatest expression in the first movements of local agriculture. In the case of Ernesto Wrede, as with the other colonists, alfalfa was harvested nine times a year and transported to Cardoso de Almeida, a station on the Estrada de

Ferro Sorocabana, from where it would go to consumer centers such as São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. The transport of products resulting from agricultural activity was carried out by means of animals bound for the aforementioned railway station.

The “Estrada de Ferro Sorocabana” reached the city of Assis in 1917, being extended to the other municipalities that were part of its original route as Paraguaçu Paulista. The small Cardoso de Almeida station was located between Assis and Paraguaçu, where the settlers dispatched production to the main consumer centers. With the sale of grains, such as wheat and soybeans, the railroad continued to be the most suitable means of transport for the flow of the large crops that Cooperativa Riograndense would reach from the 1970s onwards.

The municipality of Maracaí was outside the route of the Estrada de Ferro Sorocabana and this influenced the growth of the city. Paraguaçu Paulista already had a greater movement in its trade, reaching a better position and influence in Alta Sorocabana de Assis.

Difficulties in transport constituted a major obstacle for farmers even in obtaining food products such as salt and fat. Some of the pioneers came from the south of Brazil, and like Michel Lamb, faced difficulties in getting to the colony that was starting its activities. Among them was Alfredo Elsner.

“He arrived from the south by train, a trip that took almost a week. Then he took a goat's foot (a car of the time) to get to Maracaí, taking eight hours, to overcome a route in a trip that looked more like an adventure, starting in Cardoso de Almeida. But the worst part, Alfredo says, was arriving in the Pau Burned neighborhood, where his father-in-law Otto Koch lived. As there were no roads, the way was by trails on foot or on the back of the donkey”. (Special Magazine for the Foundation of the Mixed Agricultural Cooperative of Colônia Riograndense, 1989, p.7)

In the beginning of the settlers' activities, more collective work was common, either in the construction of houses, or in helping the plantations that were carried out in this region.

One of the oldest members of the cooperative, José Fetter, came to Colônia Riograndense in 1933, and had the help of Ernesto Wrede and Michel Lamb in the cultivation of alfalfa in an initial area of ten bushels.

The space thus began to undergo modifications with the arrival of German immigrants and the fertile lands began to show a greater value, highlighting their activity little by little. Colonia Riograndense showed a marked development from 1930 onwards, coinciding with the moment when capital accumulation became a reality in the industrial sector. The heyday of the cooperative, in 1970, took place when agriculture was assuming a business guise aimed at the needs of the agroindustry.

The spatial modifications in the Paranapanema Valley became intense as the properties were subdivided, as a result of the occupation of the area, in a type of capitalism in São Paulo agriculture due to the importance that the land assumed as an essential factor in the acquisition of capital and in its reproduction.

“Milton Santos, one of the Brazilian geographers who deepened the most at a theoretical and practical level, the critical aspect, conceptualizes space as a social fact, a product of human action a socialized nature, which in turn interferes in the social process not only because of the historicity past, but also because of the inherent load of historicity that can be constructed insofar as it is an instance of determination in the history to be constructed”. (SANTOS, 1978, p. 138.)

The hard work started by the German colonists resulted in the creation of a

cooperative that provided some improvements to the producers. Gradually, the small cooperative grew, transforming itself into a new business outfit and structuring itself for the improvement of its products through greater rationalization according to the dictates of capitalism in agriculture.

The first denomination of the Riograndense cooperative was Teuto-Brasileira and its pioneering board of directors had the following constitution: Gustavo Balduino Lamb (president), Gustavo Augusto Diesel (secretary), Emil Bruno Pol (manager) and the following fiscal advisors: Alvíso Nicolau Galas, Ernesto Wrede and Afonso Assmam with José Fetter, Germano Weischeimer and Alfredo Elsner as substitutes. This council began its activities in 1939, going through the difficulties that cooperativism in its first movements in the region of Paranapanema Valley in its portion of São Paulo imposed on it.

In this densely forested region, the majority of German settlers found in associativism the way to circumvent the dilemmas and costs of colonization. As a result, the Cooperative became one of the solutions for regional development and the establishment of new families, since living conditions outlined new possibilities for success.

“The cooperative enterprise has the following characteristics: It is an association of people who, by eliminating intermediaries, seek to ensure that their members are supplied with useful things and services at the lowest possible prices. It is not aimed at profit, but at sharing benefits among its members. Its functions are not only economic, but also solidarity among its members. (GALVES, 1986, p.135.)

Cooperativism, in general, has as its ideal the implantation of a new economic order, abolishing the thesis of profit and fighting idealistically for a “reign of a more humane social order”. (GALVES, 1986, p.135)

Agricultural cooperatives, according to Aguiar, perform a special function, which is to increase the productivity of the rural population, without which it would not be able to reach a certain degree of agrarian development, nor to supply foodstuffs to large urban centers and raw materials to branch industries. (AGUIAR, 1980, p. 117)

The cooperative doctrine emphasizes cooperative groupings and aims to enable the possibility of reorganizing economic society as a whole. This doctrine actually provided the basis for the actions of the cooperative members, in addition to influencing the organization of joint work.

The period in which the Riograndense cooperative was founded was marked by a profound transformation in the Brazilian economy, specifically in the rural environment. One of the main obstacles was the action of middlemen in products such as alfalfa and cotton, influencing their price.

With the modernization process that took place in the 1960s, Cooperativa Riograndense had to adapt, thus achieving a notable development that was very different from its first founding movements. The former agriculture aimed at small-scale commercialization was replaced by an activity seeking greater capital accumulation due in part to federal government incentives for higher value crops such as soy wheat.

When in 1964 the change of its corporate name occurred, there was a growing capitalization in Brazilian agriculture with the presence of new inputs. The State of São Paulo benefited from these changes.

The German community was based on the intensive cultivation of the soil with new technologies and machines, different from its initial activities when the pioneers found the soil wrapped in dense forest and had to penetrate its interior preparing the area for agriculture in a later stage.

“The work of felling the forest did not matter in any sophisticated technique. The settlers adopted the most common Brazilian procedures, which consisted of felling trees, clearing bushes, and at the time around August and September, burning. Once the soil had been cleaned, the planting and cultivation of primary subsistence products began: corn, beans, cassava and other products for household use, however there was no lack of pig breeding, and then cattle”. (FELIX, 1990, p.55)

The coffee expansion took place with greater speed in the 1920s towards the “new west” of São Paulo. Growth was ensured by the product’s defense policy. There was a greater intensity of its cultivation in Alta Sorocabana de Presidente Prudente and in Alta Paulista, where cities like Marília emerged later emerging as important poles of attraction and development.

“Along with coffee, other products such as cotton were grown in the region. This new investment in the expansion of the coffee economy, moving towards the West of the State, took place under conditions that were different from previous periods. Difficulties at the international level forced a greater rationalization of coffee expansion”. (CORRÊA, 1988, p.67)

Cotton was grown in the region and formed the basis of the economy of German settlers. However, in 1970, it was gradually replaced by soybean and wheat crops. From the moment this change took place, Cooperativa Riograndense took a new impulse and showed a great increase by favoring agricultural crops with greater commercial value.

“The full functioning of the Sorocabana Railroad, from Porto Epiácio to São Paulo, enabled the economic growth of the region, intensifying coffee production. It also encouraged the emergence of other crops such as, for example, cotton grown mainly in the municipalities of Santa Cruz do Rio Pardo, São Pedro do Turvo and Ourinhos. At first, cotton farming was developed on

small properties and largely with the help of immigrant labor". (CORRÊA, 1988, p.67)

The region of Paranapanema Valley was also the target of frost, which hit the coffee plantations intensely. This made producers in the region look for other crops that would provide them with better yields and that would not suffer the same devastating effects originating from the local climatic conditions.

The alfalfa crop, therefore, emerged as an option for producers concentrating their production at first. In the case of the German colonists from Rio Grande do Sul, they had great experience in its cultivation, which predominated in the colony from 1920 onwards.

"These German descendants were responsible for introducing alfalfa to the region. In less than ten years, it was taken over by the aforementioned culture. Colônia Riograndense held the title of largest producer at national level, as can be seen in the part referring to "Cooperativa Agrícola Mista da Colônia Riograndense". Production was absorbed almost entirely by the official government cavalry". (FELIX, 1990, p.56)

The means of transportation for the alfalfa flow was the railway, which constituted an important factor of regional development. According to Dióres S. Abreu, the railroad was decisive in the coffee economy, acting as a mainstay of its structure.

"It meant fast, safe and cheap transport for coffee; easy communication with the big centers. In the case of the extreme west of São Paulo, other circumstances are added. The railroad was the best way for land traders to take their buyers to the land, it favored penetration, subdivisions and occupation, the use of the soil". (ABREU, 1972, p. 38)

The importance of the railroad as a means of transport helps to understand why the settlers included the city of Assis as part of the Cooperativa Riograndense. The nearest city

of Maracaí was outside the railroad route. In addition, there was the episode that resulted in the eviction of Germans who were already living on the "Barraco farm", and their relations with Maracaí were not very friendly.

Companies that were already experiencing the influence of capitalist relations by exploring agriculture in the Paranapanema Valley were divided into two important groups. The first linked to the sugarcane culture was influenced by the Rezende Barbosa conglomerate. The second group already had a greater relationship with German immigrants and later in "Pedrinhas Paulista", with the Italians it grew with a direction of its production prioritizing wheat and soy crops with the support of its members in the cooperative assemblies.

Already in their first activities, the members of "Cooperativa Teuto-Brasileira" attended meetings at the central cooperative in the heart of São Paulo. His contact with other groups helped to articulate in favor of a cooperative now in his area of operation.

In the cultural sphere, these settlers had in associations the alternative to face the challenges of the region, also relying on religion as a way to face everyday problems. Thus, the Catholic and Lutheran communities became important groups in terms of preserving traditions, religious practice and political engagement. The Lutheran cult, for example, had preachers in German as a way of keeping the language and culture of the ancestors alive. For the younger generations, the service was also held in Portuguese.

In the city of Maracaí, on the other hand, devotion to the famous "boy on the board" predominated, which attracted pilgrims from various regions of the country and also some Pentecostal churches such as Foursquare Gospel, Assembly of God and God is Love, in addition to the Independent Presbyterian Church, this one closest denomination to

mission Protestantism.

In the 1970s, the military gave greater priority to providing subsidies for crops of great commercial value in agriculture. Sugarcane was one of them and its planting was widely disseminated as the federal government created Proalcool, providing conditions for the consolidation of agroindustry in this sector.

Similarly, soy and wheat crops received contributions and financing for their growth. This factor was important for the consolidation of ``Cooperativa Riograndense``, assuming a more capitalist format. By directing the plantations towards the wheat-soy binomial, this cooperative obtained resources to structure itself, also influencing the regional economy.

This way, the cooperative idealized by Michel Lamb showed greater vigor from 1964 onwards, transforming itself into a large capitalist unit with fierce internal disputes, but at times endowed with a business mentality that now sought to adapt to new cultures, adopting the use of new inputs to grow. maintain in the regional and national market.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The German settlers came from various parts of Brazil with a greater predominance of the southern region. The pioneer, Michel Lamb moved from Rio Grande do Sul and this factor brought contributions to the development of the future cooperative because it allowed contact between those who were born in the surroundings of the new colony with other Brazilian regions that suffered German influence.

In the specific case of ``Colônia Riograndense``, the settlers began to work with alfalfa crops and later with cotton. At

a later stage, they became concerned with soybeans and wheat, which had greater commercial value and received subsidies from the federal government.

The ``Cooperativa Riograndense`` presented a notable development in the period in which Brazilian agriculture underwent changes, adopting a "modern" agrarian standard. Generalized modernization spread to all regions of the country with greater application of chemical inputs, increased use of mechanical form and better biological inputs.

The changes were also felt at the regional level and the cooperatives played an important role in supporting the agro-industrial chain that became dynamic from 1970 onwards and needed raw materials for its operation. The structure was already being implemented in the mid-1960s, reaching its peak with the development of agribusiness, when industry and agriculture merged with well-defined objectives.

The ``Cooperativa Riograndense`` presented a good development, establishing itself as an important component in the economy of Paranapanema Valley when it started to store the production of its associates necessary for the agroindustry revolving around wheat and soy. While the former was aimed at large mills in the manufacture of flour, soybeans were more specific in the oil industry.

The old subsistence-oriented crops were replaced by those intended for agro-industrial production aimed at the domestic market and exports. From the work of the first associates, a cooperative emerged that reached its peak in the 1970s. It ended its activities in the mid-90s, causing its associates to leave for other cooperatives in the region.

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