INTERVIEW I

DATE: May 31, 1973

INTERVIEWEE: VASCO LEITÃO da CUNHA

INTERVIEWER: Dr. Richard Graham

PLACE: Ambassador Leitão da Cunha's office, Rio de Janeiro

Tape 1 of 1

G: I'm speaking to Ambassador Vasco Leitão da Cunha at his office in Rio de Janeiro on the Avenue Rio Branco, number 81, room 1105. Ambassador, what were the exact years of your ambassadorship to the United States?

L: I was received by President Johnson on the second of February, 1966, and I left Washington to retire on the last day of June 1968.

G: Could you give us your personal impressions of the President, either at the time when you were received by him and were in official relationships with him or at times when you saw him in action in other circumstances?

L: When I presented my letters of credential to the President on Febraury 2, 1966, I was very cordially received by him and had a conversation of about fifteen to twenty minutes about my mission and the relations between the United States and Brazil. But it wasn't the first time that I had met the President. I had already had the privilege of meeting him in 1964 and in 1965. In 1964, [it was] on the occasion of the ninth meeting of consultation of the foreign ministers of the American republics on the complaint made by

Venezuela against the Cuban government headed by [Fidel] Castro. On that occasion, there was a meeting of foreign secretaries in Washington, and it was decided that the countries of the continent should not maintain relations with the Cuban government until such a time as the government was not considered to be a menace to the security and the peace of the neighbors. On that occasion, I was received with the other colleagues from the American republics, as I was then foreign secretary myself, by President Johnson at the White House. Later, in 1965, during the Dominican Republic crisis, on the occasion of the meeting of the tenth consultative meeting of foreign ministers of the continent, I was received by President Johnson in Washington and talked about the problems related to the Dominican Republic.

On those two occasions, I had the very strong impression of his outstanding personality. He was not only exceedingly intelligent, but was [also] exceedingly forceful in his opinions. And I had the impression of somebody who knew exactly what he wanted and how to get it.

G: When you were ambassador, there was an occasion when the ambassadors of all the American republics were invited to Texas to the Ranch. Did you go on that excursion?

L: Yes, and we were very hospitably received by the President and Mrs. Johnson at the Ranch. We had the impression of somebody who was really happy to be on his land away from the official duties of the presidency where he treated us just as a farmer would treat his guests and received us all very cordially and affectionately.

G: At the time, some American newspapers suggested that this was a gauche kind of activity for him to undertake, that sophisticated diplomats accustomed to the pleasures of Paris would find the ranch in Texas less than pleasant.

L: I think that is very unfair, as far as the statement goes, because we were all very pleased indeed. I remember my colleagues' comments on the occasion. We were happy to be in an American home, treated by Americans who liked to be kind and hospitable to people. And we were altogether very pleased indeed with the reception held for us and the barbecue, which took place on the banks of the Pedernales.

G: Do you have recollections of Mrs. Johnson?

L: Very much so. Mrs. Johnson was a very gracious lady to us, and we had great pleasure in talking with her. My wife kept a very lasting impression.

G: Turning to your ambassadorship itself, what do you consider the major accomplishments that you were able to secure in representing Brazil in Washington?

L: I was fortunate enough not to have accomplishments to register, because, when you have accomplishments to register, it's because there are problems between the two countries. And at that time, our relations were running so smoothly that there were no problems really between the United States and Brazil, except the ordinary routine problems, such as problems of the coffee agreement and things like that which are of an international nature and on which we not always agreed, but which it was our fortune to see solved without embarrassment for any of the parties.

G: I notice when looking over the chronological record of those years, a very brief one, that in November of 1967, the American ambassador here in Brazil decided to drastically cut back the embassy staff. And it was then argued by some that this was a sign that Brazil was losing its position in terms of attention from the United States. But others argued that this was a sign of the healthy relationship that existed between the two countries.

L: Well, I think that it didn't depend at all on the relationship between the two countries. That was something of an administrative measure suggested by the ambassador for streamlining the services of his embassy. Many people think that our embassies nowadays are overstaffed and that there are too many people to do the jobs which could be done just as well by a smaller number of people.

G: What was the size of your staff at the Brazilian embassy in Washington, in rough terms?

L: I don't recollect at this moment, but it is the largest embassy that we have.

G: Very well.

Still speaking of the American ambassador, here, for a minute, Mr. [John W.] Tuthill, were there any repercussions regarding a secret interview which he had with Carlos Lacerda in January of 1968? And did these repercussions reach as far as your office?

L: No, certainly not. And besides, I don't think it was a secret interview at all. It was a casual interview.

G: I was misinformed about the secrecy of it, but obviously it wasn't secret since someone knew to put this on the list of things they gave me of things that had happened.

Let's turn next to look at the relationship between the United States and Brazil and your role as ambassador at the time. Did you find that, in some quarters of the United States, events in Brazil during those years, 1965 to mid-1968, had a repercussion in the United States that it was your duty to counter?

L: Yes. There was quite a lot that I could do in that field. I visited about half of the states of the union, some of them more than once, others even more than twice, and had the occasion to talk about the Brazilian government and the Brazilian situation to different

audiences on campuses, at press conferences, on invitation from societies which deal with international relations.

And to all these, I was able to talk about the Brazilian revolution of 1964, what it had meant to avoid the country going down into chaos and communism, and what was being done to make it become solvent, to establish its credit abroad and internally, and proceed with the process of development.

G: I would like to return to that perhaps a little later, and you could expand a bit more about your arguments which you presented at that time. But if we were looking at it chronologically still, I recall that in October of 1965, there were state elections in Brazil, in some states at least, and then these were followed by a dissolution of Brazilian political parties. I wondered how this event looked to you from the perspective of Washington?

L: Well, I was still in Brazil when that happened. I was not in Washington at that time.

G: Sorry.

L: But the dissolution of the parties was promoted for the purpose of making the country work under a two-party system, instead of a multiparty system, which split the majority and minority. The majority never had a clear-cut majority to be able to govern. The purpose was to create a two-party system, which actually was created at that time.

G: I think I'm on surer ground now. You were ambassador at the time of the election of General [Artur da] Costa e Silva.

L: Yes.

G: And at that time, did you find American public opinion, newspaper opinion, for instance, misinformed?

L: They were much better informed by then. The election took place in Congress, as you know.

G: Yes. Was there any reaction to that? That indirect election was not--

L: No, because the United States' public opinion in this matter, provided that there is a kind of election, doesn't make too much of a difference. Because you have, in a certain sense, an indirect election yourselves when you have an electoral college.

G: Right. And you felt that, at the time, Americans accepted that pretty much in the same [way]?

L: President Costa e Silva as president-elect visited the United States and was very well received here.

G: Could you reminisce about his visit? He arrived January 27, 1967, first.

L: January of 1967.

G: Yes, I think so.

L: He first visited Honolulu on his way back from the Far East. Then Los Angeles. From Los Angeles he went to--what do you call the place near Cape Kennedy?

G: Where they launch the missiles?

L: Yes, at Cape Kennedy they launch the missiles. But there is a small town about thirty miles from that where we stayed the night. Orlando. Orlando, Florida. From Orlando, Florida, then we went to Cape Kennedy to visit the NASA installations. Then we went to Washington. It was during his stay in Washington that the mishap took place where the three astronauts were burnt in the capsule.

G: The President, Costa e Silva, was in Washington at the time?

L: In Washington on that day.

G: I see. Did you meet him in Honolulu and then accompany him?

L: I went to fetch him in Honolulu and accompanied him all through the rest of the journey. And then, from Washington, he went to New York; from New York, [he] came back to Brazil.

G: While he was in Washington, naturally, he saw President Johnson.

L: Not only he saw President Johnson and had a long interview with him, but President Johnson gave him a magnificent luncheon at the White House with a very cordial and welcoming speech.

G: Were you present at the interview?

L: I was present at part of the interview.

G: What topics were discussed?

L: Basically it was inter-American relations.

G: Would you care to comment any further on details on that?

L: I don't have any particular point to make.

G: According to my notes, in December of 1966, you made a speech in which, among other things perhaps, you swore at a labor leader's remarks about Brazil. I don't know who the labor leader was. My notes provided me don't say. That's just an entry in the list.

L: I think I had a luncheon at that labor--what's it called now--AFL, isn't it?

G: Yes, AFL-CIO [American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations] headquarters.

L: AFL-CIO headquarters in Washington. I don't remember the text of the speech there.

G: Do you remember any impressions that you were attempting to set aright?

L: They were concerned with the questions of the unions in Brazil. Because the unions in Brazil have been, in some cases, taken over by pro-communists, and these were ousted by the revolution of 1964. And I think they were concerned about the free workings of these unions.

G: And you were able to reassure them?

L: Yes. I was able to reassure them as far as that was concerned.

G: A few weeks earlier, Hubert Humphrey had made a speech in which he had included critical remarks about the military rule in Brazil, in which he said something to the effect that the military should step down from power, or the United States should not maintain such close relationships with military governments. Do you remember that occasion?

L: I don't have a clear memory of that episode.

G: It didn't necessarily involve you, but he did mention Brazil as a case in point.

L: He talked generally, happened to mention Brazil *en passent*. I don't think he directed his speech at Brazil.

G: You're right. I think that that's correct.

L: He talked about it in general terms and general principles.

G: And then used Brazil as an example of a country that--

L: It was one of the examples. Not as the [only] example, but as one of the examples.

G: Was that typical of relationships with congressmen?

L: Yes. That was the typical outlook.

G: And as ambassador or as an individual, to what did you attribute this? Simply misinformation?

L: Misinformation and misunderstanding of the point. That is to say, of the real reasons why these governments were established, at least, the Brazilian government was established as such.

G: In what way did they misunderstand it?

L: You're talking about 1967?

G: Yes. Let's say 1967.

L: Well, because the president happened to be a military man and because some people have been banned from political life, they attributed this to a lack of democratic organization in the country. Now the president had been elected by Congress. Congress was working. The press was free of censorship. The courts were granting habeas corpus. So there was no basic reason to feel that the country was not really democratically governed.

G: I'm not sure that there was a press law, but my notes say there was a press law in January of 1967.

L: Yes. There was a press law.

G: What were its terms, and how would that fit into what you just said?

L: In many countries there exist press laws. Press laws are not necessarily the sign of censorship. You see, President Costa e Silva explained that himself to the press conference which he gave at breakfast in New York, I thought very ably indeed, when he said our press law was a law of responsibility, which gave responsibility to the press and not irresponsibility. Because the system in Brazil of free press was a free press with no restrictions whatsoever, even as regards slander, misinformation, and publishing of state secrets and things like that. So there was no kind of regulatory procedure.

G: And this law provided ways in which libel and slander could be charged in the courts--

L: Yes.

G: --and the responsible persons brought to trial. And the same thing goes for state secrets, and so on.

Now, was it at that time or was it later--I think it was later--that the laws regarding the press included the provision that it would be a crime against national security to divulge information that, even though true, would bring discredit upon the government.

L: That's later.

G: That's a later time. We might get back to your comments about that afterwards, as an individual, later on.

But while we're still talking about your ambassadorship, in February of 1967, a consortium of U.S. banks granted some sort of fund financing to Brazil, either the Brazilian government or to Brazilian enterprises. I'm not sure which.

L: It was Brazilian enterprises.

G: Do you feel that the business climate created by the revolutionary government was responsible for attracting that kind of investment?

L: No doubt. There was no doubt about that. Until 1965--

(Interruption)

G: You should see what it's like after fifty years have passed and I'm trying to reconstruct events of 1889, say. It's much harder. So we need your help.

We're speaking about the investment climate in Brazil.

L: Investment climate in 1965. In 1964, Brazil was on the way to bankruptcy and chaos. Our arrears in commercial debts, our debts in foreign currencies, all of those were

unsettled and unpaid. The new government of President Castelo Branco set out to put that in order. And we are today in 1973 still benefiting from the measures which were taken on that occasion. Everything which has happened to Brazil since then is the result of the measures which were taken by the Castelo Branco government, followed, seriously, by the Costa e Silva government and by the [Emílio Garrastazu] Medici government. There has been continuity in financial and economic policies, which has allowed us to attain the speed of development which is attracting foreign investment all the time. We started to attract it about that time, 1967. Because in 1964, our growth rate was about 1.3 per cent and the population rate rose to 3.1, so that there was much less to go around for more people each time. And gradually, that started to move off until now we are growing at the rate of 2.9 per cent in population, and in gross national product, 9.0 a year, and for five consecutive years.

G: As ambassador, did you specifically make it a point to convey this new climate to the American business community?

L: Yes.

G: Did you speak to bankers?

L: I spoke to chambers of commerce and things like that. But the bankers themselves found that out on their own. It was much more difficult to convince public opinion than it was to convince the banking community .

G: Before we turn to the subject of your defenses of your propagation of this understanding of Brazilian events, do you recall any other developments during the period in which you were ambassador which you would like to comment on?

L: No, except to say that I thought that in the United States one is always very well received wherever one goes. I was most gratified at the receptions given me at all the places in the different states that I went to. I found that there was a lot of curiosity and interest regarding Brazil. And even at a university like Berkeley, where I was heckled and picketed, nevertheless there was a certain cordiality in the atmosphere.

G: I didn't know that that had happened at Berkeley.

L: Yes.

G: Would such an action be attributed to radical student movements?

L: Exactly. The radical students were against our Brazilian government and, therefore, interested in making their points regarding my presentation.

G: Did that happen at any other university?

L: No. Only questions, not heckling or picketing. Now picketing, I was picketed also, I think, at Michigan State. There was a picket, just a small picket. Actually, I had forgotten it. Now, suddenly, it came back to my mind.

G: Well, let's turn, then, to the period just before you became ambassador to the United States. You were named foreign minister, in April and remained so I gather until--

L: April 1964 until December 1965.

G: Will you reminisce about those months, any problems you dealt with, and how you saw Brazil's position changing?

L: Brazilian foreign policy had traditionally been the foreign policy of a country which is in the West. It belongs to the West. And in 1964, when the government of Castelo Branco took over, we replaced this policy in its traditional terms that belonged to the West, and

[we were] not a country which was flirting with the so-called socialist world, which was the attempted policy of the [João] Goulart government.

G: What specific actions did the foreign policy of Brazil take that would reflect this shift? Did it break relations with any socialist countries?

L: No. We decided to have relations with every country, irrespective of their form of government, provided that they respected our form of government. The only country from which we separated ourselves was Cuba, because we considered that not only were they trying to subvert the countries on this continent, but also that, according to the resolutions at the OAS [Organization of American States], the communist system was incompatible with the Inter-American system. After all, we severed relations with Cuba at that time.

G: The OAS resolution regarding that had been taken two years earlier?

L: The resolution considering that communism is incompatible with the inter-American system was previous to that, some years previous to that. Cuba had actually in 1964 been expelled from the OAS. But we went further. Because not all the countries had broken off relations with them, although they had no longer belonged to the OAS.

G: Brazil had maintained relations with Cuba up until the thirteenth of May, 1964. Was there any specific action on the part of the Cuban government that prompted it?

L: No. We just continued to consider that there was no use in maintaining relations with a government which decided to foment rebellion in other countries and with which we could find no points of agreement regarding inter-American policies or binational policies.

(Interruption)

G: We were talking about the severing of your relations with Cuba and the feeling that the Brazilian government had regarding that measure.

When you took over as foreign minister, did you find the staff of the Foreign Office enthusiastic about the revolution and more or less unanimously willing to follow in this direction?

L: Yes. There was no doubt about this. The public servants in the Foreign Office serve any government. They are professional diplomats; they are not politicians.

G: For instance, I don't know who he was, but the man who had been ambassador of Brazil in Cuba representing the Goulart government didn't find it difficult to adjust at the time at all?

L: No. Not at all. I had been myself ambassador to Cuba many years before that and had been very favorable to Castro before he turned communist.

G: When were you the ambassador in Cuba?

L: From 1956 to 1961.

G: Very interesting. Did you know the American ambassador there at that time, [inaudible]?

L: I know there were three of them. [Arthur] Gardner. Another chap, my friend.

G: Was there a Smith?

L: Earl Smith, and my other friend who was the career diplomat, Phil Bonsal.

G: They have written. Bonsal recently, and, I think, Smith earlier.

L: Both of them wrote a book.

G: Have you read those books?

L: Yes. They're interesting.

G: Did you find their observations accurate?

L: In many cases, yes. The subject is too vast to be able to say that you agree with every word which is written. But you can't mix the two books.

G: No. That's right.

L: They're different types of books.

G: They're different points of views.

L: With different points of view.

G: I believe it was Bonsal who also felt friendly toward the Castro regime until it turned communist. And I gather that would be the point of view that you would have shared.

L: Until such a time as they decided to, by a sleight of hand, transform a revolution which was popular and done by the middle class and the peasants into a communist takeover.

G: At the time when you became foreign minister, as you look back at that time to the months immediately preceding, did you feel that Cuba had posed a real threat to Brazil, in terms of subversion and exploiting the revolution?

L: I think that it was a threat in the sense of propaganda. The youth was all enthusiastic about the Cuban revolution, which was only natural. And then when they became communistic, they decided to come and make propaganda and infiltrate and train guerillas in their own land to come over and help subvert other countries.

G: The youth to which you referred to at first was the Brazilian youth who was enthusiastic about the Cuban revolution?

L: Yes.

G: And when the Cuban revolution shifted its course into communism, then the Cubans began sending people to Brazil to train Brazilians, or Brazilians began going to Cuba?

L: Going to Cuba to be trained there.

G: And when they returned to Brazil, then you feel that they posed a genuine threat?

L: Posed a threat.

G: Was that as true later on, do you think? Say, after 1968, for instance, after you were ambassador? In other words, we were talking as foreign minister before, and you went to the United States for a few years. When you came back here, did you feel that there was still a threat of subversion?

L: I think that they continued to make their propaganda. I don't think they've given up at all.

G: Even today?

L: Even today. There may be some soft peddling on the part of Moscow, but I don't believe they've taken any notice of that.

G: Some other American countries have re-established relations with Cuba on the grounds that--

L: Against the resolution taken at the ninth meeting of foreign ministers in Washington in 1964.

G: But they've done this on the grounds that Cuba's no longer a threat.

L: But according to the resolution, the matter should be brought back to the Council of the OAS to decide.

One country didn't ever respect the resolution. It was Mexico. They never broke relations.

G: When you dealt with the representative to the Mexican government, did you try to persuade them at any time that they should follow the Brazilian example?

L: We all tried to persuade them, and then they voted against it, and they stuck to it.

G: That's at the time of the OAS meeting?

L: At the time of the OAS meeting.

G: The fact that you were named foreign minister almost immediately after that revolution of 1964 would suggest that you were among those who had dealt with or had knowledge of the revolution as it was being formed.

L: It might suggest that, but wrongly, except that I was informed of what was going on. But I was on my way between Moscow and Lisbon. I was ambassador at Moscow, and I had been appointed as ambassador to Lisbon. I came here to collect my things and my family and go to Lisbon.

G: Had you known Castelo Branco earlier?

L: I knew him in the war when he was chief of G-3 in the Brazilian Expeditionary Force.

G: Were you in the Expeditionary Force, or were you the ambassador?

L: No. I was Brazilian *charge d'affairs* in Rome. I came to Italy to establish relations with the new Italian government. I met him there on the Italian front.

G: I see.

Well, to what do you attribute the fact that you were named foreign minister?

L: I don't know; until this day I don't know. I suppose they thought that I had sufficient experience in Moscow and Cuba and knew that I was not a communist or pro-communist. They decided to get a professional for the job, against my opinion. I think that foreign ministers should not be diplomats.

G: You think they should be more linked to the political--

L: They should be politicians.

G: But once you became foreign minister, did you find your diplomatic experience a hindrance? Did you wish you hadn't--

L: No. It wasn't a hindrance, but for that you have a secretary general; you delegate that to him. It's like you don't need to have a general to be minister of defense. You have the chiefs of staff for that.

G: Who were your colleagues in the ministry? [Roberto de Oliveira] Campos must have been minister of planning.

L: Campos was minister of planning. I was made minister of foreign affairs before Castelo was elected. I was made minister by the provisional set-up, which was the president of the House, which is called the speaker of the House in the States, [Pascoal Ranieri] Mazzilli, and the command of the revolution.

G: Which was made up of three generals?

L: Made up of a general and an Air Force general and an admiral. Costa e Silva; [Adm. Augusto Hamann] Rademaker who is now vice president; and Mourao [?], who is dead, he was the Air Force general.

So that's why I thought I was going to be a very interim foreign minister. It didn't occur to me to become foreign minister. I never wanted it, and it never occurred to me. I had already been twice secretary general in the Foreign Office which was quite sufficient.

G: I suppose Castelo Branco was elected on the--

L: By Congress on, I don't remember accurately, the eleventh or twelfth of April.

G: And did he take over office immediately?

L: He took over on the fifteenth.

G: And then some of the former ministers were dismissed, but you were kept on.

L: A few. Some of them were dismissed. I was kept on. I don't know why.

G: How did you get on with the other members of the Cabinet?

L: Very well.

G: Did I understand in your former remarks to the effect that Castelo Branco had set the government's economic policy on a direction which has been followed ever since? Was there a slight indication that you felt [Antônio] Delfim Neto, the present minister of finance, is getting too much credit?

L: No, he's getting just all the credit; that's all; which is unfair to his predecessor, [Alfredo] Bulhões, and Campos. But I'm not complaining that he gets the credit. I think he deserves it, and he deserves it all the more for following them. He's been very clever about it, intelligent, politically intelligent, too. They bargained for a technician, and they found a very rare politician.

G: In what ways is he such a--

L: He has a political mind. He knows how to get things done.

G: I suppose the best evidence of that is the fact that he has been so fully backed up.

L: All the time. But in an unpopular period such as Castelo Branco's. . . . Castelo Branco gave Bulhões and Campos all the back-up they needed, without which they wouldn't have been able to carry out their policy. And he was willing to face unpopularity, provided he did the right thing. It was only gradually that it dawned on the majority of people that the policies were the correct ones and they had to be followed if they were going to bear fruit.

G: A while ago you mentioned the fact the foreign officer follows his government's instructions and is not a politician. During the time when you represented the Goulart government abroad, you were posted in Moscow at the time?

L: I was posted in Moscow, by Goulart.

G: Did you find this. . . .

L: I was sent there because they wanted somebody that they felt wasn't going to sell them down the river.

G: Yet there was the implication that Goulart was himself selling Brazil down the river?

L: Not at the moment I was appointed. I was appointed in the early months of his government. But he wasn't selling it down the river through the embassy in Moscow.

G: Your transfer from Moscow to Lisbon, was that a sign of change in policy?

L: No, I'd spent two years in Moscow, which was the time that they told me that they'd send me for. Then they asked me to go to Lisbon, which I accepted.

G: While you were in Moscow, did you feel that it would have been easy for someone else to have sold Brazil down the river at that moment?

L: That's a very difficult question to answer because it depends on his instructions. Foreign service agents follow their instructions.

G: And you never received instructions that you found difficult to carry out because of any personal difference between you and those instructions?

L: I personally, to this day, don't think Goulart was a communist or is a communist. I think he was just weak and incapable.

G: What about his brother [-in-law]?

L: Demagogue. And his brother [-in-law] was a perfect demagogue. I don't think he was a communist, either. They played the communist game, which is just as bad, if it's not worse than being a communist, because there's no sincerity in it.

G: When you say they were demagogues, you refer to their appeal to demands which could not realistically be met for increasing distribution [of wealth]?

L: Exactly. It's not the intention of improving distribution of wealth, which everybody has. I mean everybody in their senses has.

G: When you were ambassador to the United States, and you made speeches around the country explaining what was going on in Brazil, did you find it embarrassing to have to recount the mistakes made by the previous government?

L: No.

G: As a Brazilian abroad, you'd have to say, "Well, our previous government did this and this wrong."

L: No, because I had to defend the revolutionary government.

G: Let's see. I wanted to ask you, then, about your life before this period. For instance, I believe you had a role in the [Getúlio] Vargas years. It was not strictly that of a diplomat. You participated in some councils of government or economic planning.

L: No, I was acting attorney general, which here is minister of justice.

G: During what period was that?

L: 1941 to 1942. August 1941 to July 1942. Because I was the chief assistant to the Minister of Justice, and he took sick leave. The President didn't want him to resign. So he gave him sick leave, and he was away for eleven months, and I was in charge for eleven months.

G: At that time then, even before then, you were a part of the staff of the Minister of Justice?

L: I was, for a few months before that, from March to August.

G: Some people have commented that they see a strange ambivalence in comparing the present Brazilian government and the Vargas years, because, on the one hand, there was the same insistence on order and a certain--

L: Yes. There is a tendency.

G: And yet others have suggested that, actually, the leaders of the present government were--maybe not the present today, but in 1964--were impelled by a continuing revulsion to the heritage of Getúlio Vargas.

L: --yes, in that sense, yes. The only thing in which they were similar is that the Vargas government, in that period, was anti-communist. And that is their basic similarity.

G: You don't feel that--

L: The communist leader was imprisoned after an armed rebellion had taken place in 1935.

G: Luis Carlos Prestes.

L: Luis Carlos Prestes, who was the secretary general of the Brazilian Communist Party. I think he still lives.

G: As minister of justice in the forties, you weren't personally embarrassed by the fact that, at that time, there was no what we call political freedoms.

L: No. As I tell you, I am a perfect public servant. I wasn't there as a politician. Public servants are supposed to do what they are told to do. Politicians are supposed to do what they think is right, which is different. So that when they don't do what they think is right, they are committing an act of treason towards their tenets. Whereas public servants are supposed to do what they are told to do whether they like it or not, whether they agree to it or not. That's what they're paid for.

G: I think that's an admirable attitude on that.

When did you enter the public service?

L: 1927.

G: 1927. If I may ask you, how old were you then?

L: In 1927, I was twenty-three. I took the exams for the foreign service when I was twenty-three.

G: And at that time you entered the Institute of [inaudible].

L: That didn't exist. The Institute of [inaudible] was created after the Second World War.

G: What kind of training did you receive as a foreign service officer?

L: None, except the service itself. We took exams for knowledge in certain matters, certain subjects, languages. We had to speak and write English, French, Portuguese, and a fourth language. We had to know history and geography, both world history and geography and Brazilian history and geography. We had to know international law, private law, public law. We had to know commercial law. You took exams as if you were going to the university, or rather, you had to do more than that. It was as if you were going to do postgraduate work. I was already a lawyer when I took the exam.

G: Had you studied at São Paulo?

L: No, here in Rio.

G: Wasn't that a rather new law school in Rio?

L: No, the law school is old.

G: The Rio law school?

L: Yes. The São Paulo and the Recife ones are the oldest, and the schools of medicine in Rio and [Salvador] Bahia are the oldest. They date from the first quarter of the nineteenth century. My [great?] grandfather studied in São Paulo and in Recife. My father already studied in Rio.

G: Were your father and grandfather also [lawyers]?

L: They were lawyers.

G: Did they exercise political office?

L: My [great-] grandfather was a congressman for the last congress of the empire in 1888. After that, he decided not to continue in the republic. He didn't run for office anymore.

G: Did you know your [great-?] grandfather?

L: Very well.

G: Was he a monarchist?

L: Yes. All his life.

G: And what about your father?

L: He was also a monarchist.

G: What about you?

L: I am, too.

G: You know, though, the pretender to the throne?

L: Yes, both of them. (Laughter) But I am a monarchist in the sense that I think that the government which best governs Brazil was the constitutional empire. And since then, it has been the Castelo Branco government. Probably, the [inaudible].

G: Being a monarchist in Brazil does not mean that one realistically expects a restoration of the monarchy?

L: No, no. That's why I say that it's different with me than with my [great-] grandfather. My [great-] grandfather was probably attached by loyalty to the crown or to the emperor himself.

G: But getting back in 1927, you entered the foreign service that year. Do you remember the posts that you served and more or less in what order?

L: Yes. First I served in the office here for two years; then, in Peru, Lima; then in Lisbon, Portugal; then in the Argentine, Buenos Aires; then in Chile, Santiago; then back to the office here; then to the Ministry of Justice; then to North Africa, when the Allies were there--that's where I met [Dwight] Eisenhower and Robert Murphy and [Charles] De Gaulle, and [Harold] Macmillan; then in Italy--I was there when the Expeditionary Force was there; then in Switzerland, Geneva; then in Spain, Madrid; then for eight months in the Balkan Commission of the United Nations in Greece; then in the Ministry of [inaudible]; then back to the office here as head of the political department of the office, then secretary general of the foreign office; then ambassador to Brussels, Belgium; then ambassador to Cuba; again secretary general, for three months; then ambassador to Moscow; then foreign secretary; then ambassador to Washington.

G: When you were posted to Argentina--

L: I was the second secretary.

G: --did you find at that time the same sense of raillery that seems to exist today? |

L: In a sense, yes, in a certain sense. They tease us, and we don't bother about them. But on the whole, I think that they are a friendly nation, and I liked them. I think it is in the Brazilian interest to have a prosperous and happy Argentine.

G: Since you were ambassador to the United States, which is to say from 1965 to the middle of 1968, what have you been doing since then?

L: Well, since I've retired. I've become a member of the advisory council of this bank here in São Paulo. I am a member of the International Advisory Council of Morgan Guaranty Trust. I am a member of the Advisory Council of ITT in Brazil. I am a member of the Advisory Council of [inaudible] Cruz. What else am I? I am a member of the

Commercial Association of Rio de Janeiro. And I have been for three years, and will be for another year, president of the Brazilian-American Institute for [inaudible].

G: I notice in the list of companies of which you form a member of their advisory councils, a predominance of international companies or companies with international connections.

L: Yes.

G: Now, I'm curious as to whether this is a result of contacts established during foreign service or as a result of family business interests?

L: No, I think it's more the first than the second. Because my father was a lawyer and my grandfather was a lawyer, but they were only lawyers; they weren't businessmen. I imagine the American companies must have invited me because they knew me in Washington or knew me in the foreign service. I'll try and get you a curriculum of my [background]. I'll just make them in a second.

G: Very good. Since your retirement from the foreign service, we commented on your view of Brazilian economic policy, but we did not return to the current Brazilian political policy, shall we say. Did you find, for instance, that the alterations of December 1968--the actions of the [inaudible]--did you find that acceptable to you? Did you feel in sympathy with them?

L: I think it was a necessity, painful necessity.

G: Despite four years of revolutionary government, you feel that there was still such a danger to the republic or to the institutions?

L: There was a danger of going back to demagoguery.

G: You arrived in Rio directly from Washington, I suppose.

L: Yes.

G: So you were here the last half of 1968.

L: Exactly. July. I arrived on the first of July.

G: And what were the events that you felt justified the alterations of the end of the year?

L: Well, that was all that row, those student manifestations, and then the question of the Congress, when they asked Congress for the authorization to proceed legally against one of the deputies. Congress refused.

G: That was M. Moreira Alves?

L: M. Moreira Alves, yes.

G: As I recall, he had made a speech which the government felt was a threat to the government?

L: Yes, it was a very unfortunate speech. And Congress, itself, didn't correct the situation. They should have been able to cope with it themselves by disavowing the speech. The speech asked the young ladies not to go out with officers and things like that.

G: Oh, not to go with officers.

L: Creating a feeling against the military. Enticing the feeling against the military. Not to date the officers. And calling all of the armed forces as--how would you call it? The word escapes me now--henchmen, I would say. A very unfortunate speech.

G: And that was not simply one incident, but one of [many]?

L: One of many.

G: And you felt that if a stop was not put to this, Brazilian political life would degenerate once again to the point of. . . .

L: Well, that's what they alleged, and it seems that they were right.

G: And it was at that time, then, that many of the liberties that western democracies have considered so important, such as liberty of the press--

L: Yes, the establishment of censorship, and the suspension of habeas corpus, and things like that.

G: It has sometimes been said that this was killing a mosquito with a cannon.

L: It depends on how you look at it.

G: Do you feel that the occasions of terrorism in 1969 were a result of the frustrated efforts of those who were dissatisfied with the regime and could not express that dissatisfaction in peaceful ways?

L: No, I think not. I think the tendency is just to be terroristic because they are. That's, how you say, a tendency which doesn't depend on the fact that they cannot manifest themselves otherwise. You see the terrorists in the Argentine are now turning against the new [Héctor José] Campora government, which they are supposed to support. And the kidnapping of an ambassador had nothing to do with the problem. I mean in the local [de Roca?] government.

G: Well, there's one detail of an earlier statement of yours that I meant to come back to. I think we'll do that now, if you agree. When you were ambassador to the United States, one of the questions at issue was coffee.

L: Yes. The coffee agreement.

G: Coffee agreement.

L: Soluble coffee. Instant coffee, as you put it.

G: What were the issues at issue?

L: It was a question of exporting unexportable coffee to be able to make instant coffee in the United States, so that the United States maintained a difference of treatment between the foreign firms and the Brazilian firms. The Brazilian firms in Brazil were allowed to buy this coffee to make instant coffee with, and that was a cheaper kind of coffee. And the buyers in the United States were not allowed to buy this, because this was the coffee that was being exported. It's a second-grade coffee which cannot be exported.

G: Brazil does not allow that kind of coffee to be exported regularly in order to maintain the high quality and high standard?

L: High quality of export, high standard--

G: But it allows--

L: --in the coffee agreement.

G: But in the case of instant coffee, it doesn't really matter?

L: No, because it's broken coffee. It's not that the coffee is of bad quality, but it's broken beans.

G: Which really just have a bad appearance, and not [poor quality]?

L: Exactly. They're not presentable. But we had no objections. That was our objection. We had no objections to the Americans coming to make soluble coffee here.

G: Who were the companies making soluble coffee here?

L: Well, they still are. They're various ones.

G: Yes. Who are? Nestle?

L: And then there were Brazilian companies.

G: And then several Brazilian companies. American companies had established such plants in Costa Rica, I believe, or some place in Central America.

L: I think so. Yes.

G: But they had not followed the invitations of the Brazilian government in the early sixties to establish those plants here.

L: Well, we actually didn't invite them, but we told them that they would be welcome if they did come. I mean we had no objections.

G: Yes.

L: Because they complained of discrimination.

G: Did that issue put you into contact with senators and congressmen, who were debating?

L: No, I didn't get to the [Congress].

G: You dealt only with representatives of the State Department, who were economic specialists.

L: Yes.

G: Was it during your ambassadorship that Brazil agreed to levy a tax on exports of soluble coffee?

L: Yes.

G: To compensate this.

L: That was one of the outcomes.

G: Would it be fair to say that that was a price that Brazil had to pay for continuing to export soluble coffee to the United States?

L: In a sense.

G: Didn't it seem strange that at the very time when the United States was encouraging industrialization in underdeveloped areas, that it should protest so loudly against this?

L: I always complained about that. The United States has yet some parts of its own country underdeveloped in a sense that you have certain industries which are old-fashioned and which are not economic. And therefore, you should let them go overboard, and let the developing countries work those industries in their own countries, their own lands; and you stick to the higher, sophisticated industries which you are capable of and which the developing countries are still not capable of. Then there wouldn't be such friction, and at the same time, you would not prevent the industrialization of the developing countries which you propose to help.

G: In these negotiations, the United States officers presumably wanted much higher Brazilian tax on exports of coffee.

L: Yes, I don't remember the exact details, because these are the more technical questions which was not exactly my field of negotiation. But I think they wanted a higher tax than we were willing to give. I don't remember, now, the figures.

G: How does that kind of bargaining take place at the international level? That is, I know how bargaining takes place at the street corner fair, but how does it [in this case]?

L: The same kind of bargaining goes on within the other level. You get your specialists to discuss with the other specialists usually.

G: You didn't feel that the United States was bluffing as to the measures they would take?

L: No, I don't think they were bluffing them. And that was quite clear. What happens is that there is a strong lobby pressuring the United States government in these cases, and many times the government feels that it has to attend to this lobby, just as they would with the sugar lobby. And this also takes place with cotton, for instance. We have

trouble with cotton goods. Because you have the industries of your own, old-fashioned cotton goods industries.

G: And Brazilian cotton exports were competing?

L: We were competing. So then they come and ask if they can put a quota on. Well, when they put a quota on, they're defeating the principles of the Alliance for Progress.

G: Would you say, in retrospect, that the Alliance for Progress was a success?

L: I think that, in a sense, it was a success. I don't think it was all the success that was expected of it, but I don't think it was the failure that they make it out to be. It's a slow process.

G: What are the forces that prevented it from being more of a success than it was?

L: I think the diversities themselves of the countries in this Alliance for Progress, because the Alliance for Progress is like a convoy at sea in which [each?] ship has its own speed, and the convoy goes as fast as the slowest ship. They can't go any faster; otherwise, it's not a convoy. And then the contradictions in the United States policy itself.

G: Such as?

L: Such as these quotas, complaints about soluble coffee, and things like that. Then you get the trade unions. The unions are protesting because they think that there's going to be unemployment if the imports increase in terms of manufactures. They have their own problems.

G: How did you counter the argument regarding unemployment resulting from closing down of American coffee purchasing plants?

L: They would have to find some other means, or a means of some other industry, to do it.

G: Would you want to comment on any other aspect of anything we've touched upon or anything else that has occurred to you?

L: I don't know. I think we've been going around and around, and I don't know how much you've got which is interesting or not. Perhaps you want some more of it. I think that, for today, that's more or less what we can have.

G: All right. Today is May 31, 1973. I've been talking to Ambassador Vasco Leitão da Cunha at his office in Rio. Thank you.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I].

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OF

VASCO LEITÃO da CUNHA

TO THE

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Rio 17/12/16

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Rec 12/12/16

Signed: _____
Donor **Pedro Horacio José Maria Leitão da Cunha.**

Dated: Rio 12/12/16

Pursuant to the authority of Chapter 21 of Title 44, United States Code, the foregoing gift of the papers and other historical materials of the Donor is determined to be in the public interest and is accepted on behalf of the United States of America, subject to the terms, conditions, and restrictions set forth herein.

Signed: _____
Susan K. Donius
Director for Presidential Libraries

Dated: March 8, 2017

APPENDIX A

(Attached to and forming part of instrument of gift of papers and other historical materials, executed by Pedro Horacio José Maria Leitão da Cunha on Dated: Rio 12/12/16 and accepted by the Director for Presidential Libraries on 3/6/2017.)

Description of the Materials:
Oral History Interview with Vasco Tristão Leitão da Cunha, conducted May 31, 1973, by Dr. Richard Graham

Signed: _____

Donor **Pedro Horacio José Maria Leitão da Cunha**.