

DICIONÁRIO DE HISTORIADORES PORTUGUESES

DA ACADEMIA REAL DAS CIÊNCIAS AO FINAL DO ESTADO NOVO

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FURTADO, Celso (Pombal, 1920 – Rio de Janeiro, 2004)

Celso Furtado was born in a small town in the interior of Paraíba called Pombal. He was the son of Maurício de Medeiros Furtado, a lawyer who followed the family tradition and became a magistrate, and Maria Alice Monteiro, heiress to landowners in the region. The couple's eight children had a childhood marked by the hardships of life in the interior. In 1927 he was a young boy and moved with his family to the capital of the state of Paraíba, where he began his studies at the Liceu Paraibano and later at the Ginásio Pernambucano when the family moved to Recife. He arrived in Rio de Janeiro in 1939, where he studied law at the University of Brazil and lived in boarding houses. At the time he worked for *Revista da Semana* [Weekly Magazine] as an editorial secretary, and at *Correio da Manhã* [Morning Mail] as a proofreader. In 1943 he became a federal civil servant after passing a competitive examination to become an organisational assistant at the Administrative Department of the Public Service (DASP). In *Revista do Serviço Público* [Public Service Magazine] he published the first articles that began to show his concern for public administration. After graduating, he went to Italy as an aspiring officer in the *Força Expedicionária Brasileira* (FEB) [Brazilian Expeditionary Force] in early 1945. The war was already in its final months, and he would return to Brazil in August, but this experience would be the basis for his first book, *Contos da Vida Expedicionária– De Nápoles a Paris* [Tales of Expeditionary Life- From Naples to Paris], published in 1946. However, this work of fiction did not reveal a vocation. In December 1946, he left for Paris determined not to follow the family tradition of becoming a magistrate: he opted for a doctorate in economics at the University of Paris, which he finished in 1948 at the age of 28. The thesis *L'économie coloniale brésilienne* [The colonial economy of Brasil] was published for the first time in Brazil in 2001 under the title *Economia colonial no Brasil nos séculos XVI e XVII– elementos de história econômica aplicados à análise de problemas econômicos e sociais*. [Colonial economy in Brazil in the 16th and 17th centuries– elements of economic history applied to the analysis of economic and social problems]. In 1948 he returned to Brazil and worked as an economist at the Getúlio Vargas Foundation in Rio de Janeiro.

In 1949 he began the most fruitful of his activities: he was appointed to the permanent staff of economists at the United Nations (UN), and he joined the Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLAC) in Santiago de Chile. Celso Furtado was an intellectual and an interventor: with the positions he held from then on and the texts he wrote, he was able to provide input for public policies that strongly influenced Brazil and Latin America. The next year, when Argentinian economist Raúl Prebisch took over the executive secretariat of ECLAC, he was appointed director of the Development Division. Prebisch had already built up a critique of the universalising models of the economic theories produced by developed countries. He stated that development did not respond to criteria that would allow the advantages of the international division of labour to be asserted, especially considering the asymmetry



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established in exchanges between producers of raw materials and producers of manufactured goods. On the path opened up by this reflection—and already announced in his doctoral thesis—Celso Furtado elaborated his interpretation of the underdevelopment of Brazil and Latin America, as well as his political stand to overcome the asymmetry that had been denounced and historically constructed. It was a time of travelling and intense study. He published his first international article, "*Formação de capital e desenvolvimento econômico*" [Capital formation and economic development], written for the *Revista Brasileira de Economia* [Brazilian Journal of Economics] and translated for the *International Economic Papers* in 1952. In 1953 he took over the presidency of the ECLAC/BNDE (*Bando Nacional de Desenvolvimento Econômico* [National Economic Development Bank]) Mixed Group, with the main task of adapting the planning of global industrialisation and development to the Brazilian context, as proposed by ECLAC. This work was presented in the document "*Esboço de um programa de desenvolvimento, período de 1955-1962*" [Outline of a development programme, period 1955-1962], which became essential for President Juscelino Kubitschek de Oliveira's Target Plan between 1956 and 1960. In the 1950s, between ECLAC missions to Brazil and Mexico and studies at the University of Cambridge, he published the books *A economia brasileira* [Brazilian Economy] (1954), *Uma economia dependente* [A dependent economy] (1956), and his most important book, *A formação econômica do Brasil* [The economical formation of Brazil] (written in 1957 and published in 1959), which were then translated into nine languages. The first Brazilian edition of this last book was the result of a study period in Cambridge and came out in 1959, when Furtado had already left ECLAC to take up a directorship at the BNDE in 1958. He went on to create the *Conselho de Desenvolvimento do Nordeste* (CODENO) [Northeast Development Council] in 1958 and the *Superintendência de Desenvolvimento do Nordeste* (SUDENE) [Northeast Development Superintendence] in 1960 at the request of President Juscelino Kubitschek, of which he was the first president.

Furtado was a reader of António Sérgio (1883-1969), João Lúcio de Azevedo (1855-1933), Oliveira Martins (1845-1894), Teófilo Braga (1843-1924) and Alexandre Herculano (1810-1877)—a group of authors he had already referenced during his doctoral defence in 1948—and followed the thinking of António Sérgio in affirming the precociousness of the development of the Portuguese maritime commercial bourgeoisie and its importance in maritime expansion. His interpretation of Brazil was based on Sérgio's hypothesis regarding the precocity of the Portuguese bourgeoisie, the process of Portuguese national emancipation, the great navigations and the process of colonisation in Brazil. In this logic, the Brazilian colony was built as an attachment of the metropolis, and the occupation and colonisation of the territory that would become Brazil was just another episode in European commercial expansion. Thus, a study that aims to historicise Brazilian underdevelopment should begin by showing the historical processes that brought the Portuguese to Brazilian lands. In the study of these processes, both in his 1948 doctoral thesis and in his most important text, *A formação econômica do Brasil* written in 1957, the weakness of the Portuguese economy—learned from reading Oliveira Martins and António Sérgio—as well as the affirmation of the poor Lusitanian arms in their imperial conquest would land on this side of the Atlantic and create a system of exploitation of land, wealth, and labour that would make up the general meaning of Brazilian colonisation and the historical origin of Brazilian underdevelopment. The Colony—a large enterprise designed to feed the Metropolis' trade with tropical products—was exploited for metropolitan interests from the very beginning. This would leave its mark on the organisation of production and the distribution of wealth. Moving around an axis located outside its own territory, the Colony was an answer to the interests of foreign trade and did not observe its internal possibilities and interests.



The comparison with the so-called settlement colonies was inevitable: the autonomy of the colonisers established in the English colonies of North America in relation to the Metropolis would explain a strong and productive economy built as early as the colonial era, which anchored its development in the contemporary world. Thus, in an attempt to escape the interpretations of European economic models and to historicise the experience of the underdevelopment process in Brazil, Furtado used the Portuguese 19th-century decadent theses to declare the original evil brought by the Portuguese coloniser. These theses were tempered with readings of John Maynard Keynes (1883-1946) and defined the terms of his public intervention in the aforementioned positions: there was a need for strong state action to overcome the colonial liabilities, promote development, and rectify the unequal distribution of wealth represented by the technologically lagging monoculture latifundia.

His work at CODENO and SUDENE—advocating that drought was a consequence of the problems in the Northeast and that the socio-economic structure of the region was responsible for the problems because it was a result of the colonial model—certainly explains his appointment as Minister of Planning in the João Goulart government from 1962. He then drew up the Triennial Economic and Social Development Plan with the aim of controlling inflation and promoting basic reforms for the development of a nationalist and progressive capitalism in Brazil. The basis of his proposals for state action was the method of historical-structural analysis—the endeavour to explain structural underdevelopment on the basis of medium and long-term historical conditions. If the assumption was that the integration between the distributive structure and the supply structure was causing a stagnation, especially considering the technological heterogeneity with economic areas that were extremely advanced and others quite backward, it would be up to the state to draw up policies to induce development. Still in 1963, he returned to SUDENE to promote a policy of tax incentives for investments made in the Northeast, the underdeveloped area of Brazil that due to his personal life story and the result of applying the aforementioned method, had always been the centre of his concerns. The 1964 military coup exiled one of Brazil's most prolific economists in the very first months of the regime of exception. The basic reforms had to be prevented, and Celso Furtado was enrolled in Institutional Act no. 1 in 1964, beginning his years of exile that would last until 1979, when Brazil's Amnesty Law was passed.

In his autobiography, Celso Furtado called the years between his appointment to ECLAC in 1949 and his work at SUDENE—which lasted until the 1964 Military Coup—an "organised fantasy" and an "undone fantasy." This was a period during which he put together a theory of underdevelopment and a narrative of its historicization. He also put forth a set of public policies that would rescue the Northeast and rescue Brazil from underdevelopment. After these years, between his imposed exile and his return to Brazil, "O Velho" [The Oldman]—as the Brazilian-born Portuguese economist Maria da Conceição Tavares used to call him—brought comfort to his fellow economists who had inherited his disdain of underdevelopment through his constant public intervention, whether in academic circles or through political action in specific positions. In exile, he taught in Santiago de Chile, Yale, and Paris. He was a professor of Economic Development at the Faculty of Law and Economic Sciences of the University of Paris. He was the first foreign professor appointed at a French university. He also taught in Washington, Cambridge, and Columbia. During his time away from the country, when he was only able to return for sporadic seminars, he published *Subdesenvolvimento e estagnação na América Latina* [Underdevelopment and stagnation in Latin America] (1966), *Um projeto para o Brasil* [A project for Brazil] (1968), *Análise do modelo brasileiro* [Analysis of the Brazilian model] (1972), *O mito do desenvolvimento econômico* [The myth of economic development] (1974), *Criatividade e dependência na civilização industrial* [Creativity and dependence in industrial civilization] (1978),

among other works.

On his return from exile in 1979, he joined the Brazilian Democratic Movement Party (PMDB) in 1981, took part in the working group that wrote the Tancredo Neves (1910-1985) government's Action Plan in 1985, and was a member of the Constitutional Studies Commission that gave rise to Brazil's current Constitution. Also because of his ties to the PMDB, he became Minister of Culture in the José Sarney (1930-) government between 1986 and 1988 and was responsible for approving legislation on tax incentives for culture in Brazil. There are undoubtedly traces of the desire of many of the exiles to resume their political activities, which had been repressed since 1964: Furtado still believed in the possibility of improving the distribution of wealth in Brazil by inducing economic development through the state, but now he was focusing his activity on supporting national culture. In the 1980s and 1990s, as well as devoting himself to political activities in Brazil, he held positions at the UN as a member of the World Commission for Culture and Development and the International Bioethics Commission and was also elected to the *Academia Brasileira de Letras* [Brazilian Academy of Letters] in 1997. He lived to write his memoirs and review his career in a style reminiscent of his first confessional work, written after his experience with the FEB in 1945. He died at home in Rio de Janeiro in 2004. The President of the Republic, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (1945-), decreed three days of official mourning in Brazil.

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