

Hermes Rodrigues da Fonseca, Field Marshal



Biography

He was a serviceman, born in the city of São Gabriel, in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, on May 12, 1855. Hermes da Fonseca was a republican, a freemason and the nephew of the first president of the country, Deodoro da Fonseca. Minister of War of the Afonso Pena administration (1906-1909), he instituted the Law of Mandatory Military Service. In 1910, he was one of the founders of the Conservative Republican Party. He was directly elected president on November 15, 1910. With the assassination of Pinheiro Machado, director of the Conservative Republican Party, he left Brazil in 1915 to live in Europe, after taking a leave of absence from the Army. He came back to the country in 1920, and in 1923, he was transferred to the reserve with the rank of Field Marshal. He died in Petrópolis, state of Rio de Janeiro, on September 9, 1923.

Presidential Period

Hermes da Fonseca was the first serviceman elected to the presidency in a national election. His election was the expression of the lack of agreement between the leaders from São Paulo and Minas Gerais, and the emergence in the political scene of the alliance of Rio Grande do Sul with the military, thus breaking the “coffee and milk policy”. The influence of the president of the Senate, Pinheiro Machado, in the government, lasted from the suggestion of nomination of Hermes da Fonseca’s candidacy until the end of the presidential period.

Early in the administration, the Chibata Revolt broke out, the mutiny of sailors who opposed the regime of physical punishment used in the Navy. The whip was the instrument used by the officers to punish the sailors who committed faults considered to be serious. After the punishment of sailor Marcelino Rodrigues, who received 250 lashes, which was witnessed by the entire tribulation of the Minas Gerais battleship, triggered the revolt lead by João Cândido Felisberto, who was known as the Black Admiral. During this movement, a fleet composed of three battleships came to the point of turning their cannons towards the city of Rio de Janeiro.

During his administration, Hermes da Fonseca used federal troops to ensure his policy of intervention in the states, which was called “the salvation policy”, supporting the candidates who were favorable to the central government.

On September 12, 1912 a rebellion, with a messianic characteristic, broke out in the litigious region between the current states of Paraná and Santa Catarina, known as the Contestado (disputed) zone. The troops from the government of Paraná initiated the first confrontation in the city of Irani. Among the 23 peasants killed, was votary José Maria, leader of the movement and who intended to create a “celestial monarchy” in the region. In the area under his influence, no taxes could be collected and no form of land ownership was allowed. After several armed conflicts, where about twenty thousand people were killed, the rebellion was suppressed in 1915, during the administration of Venceslau Brás.

On March 16, 1913; the government watched, in the federal capital, the manifestation of approximately ten thousand people against the deportation of union leaders, in compliance with the law that determined the expulsion from the country, of any foreigners involved in strikes. In May, there were labor manifestations in several states. On October 8, at the request of the president, a state of siege was declared in the federal capital, in an attempt to contain the wave of strikes and to control the workers movement. In December of the same year, Hermes da Fonseca declared a state of siege in Ceará, due to the revolution in Juazeiro do Norte, a movement that originated from the alliance formed between Father Cícero and the opposers to the administration of Franco Rabelo, who had been nominated by the federal government.

Source: National Archive – Information Center of Presidential Collections.

Summary

Sixth Period of the Republican Government - 15.11.1910 a 15.11.1914

- | Born: São Gabriel - RS, on 05.12.1855
- | Died: Petrópolis- RJ, on 09.09.1923
- | Profession: Serviceman (Field Marshal)
- | In office: from 11.15.1910 to 11.15.1914 (04y)