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# Müller, Lauro

By [Karl Schurster](#)

Müller, *Lauro Severiano*

Brazilian diplomat, minister of foreign affairs, engineer

Born 08 November 1863 in Itajaí, state of Santa Catarina, Brazil

Died 30 January 1926 in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

**Lauro Müller was the Brazilian minister of foreign affairs between 1912 and 1917. A pro-German politician and intellectual, he was heavily criticised during World War I by the Brazilian press and pro-United States intellectuals. Brazil maintained neutrality in the war until Müller left the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 3 May 1917.**

## Table of Contents

[1 Political Career](#)

[2 Müller and the Brazilian Politics of Neutrality](#)

[3 Müller and the Brazilian Declaration of War](#)

[Selected Bibliography](#)

[Citation](#)

## Political Career

Born in 1863 in the city of Itajaí, in the Brazilian state of Santa Catarina, and son of [German immigrants](#), Lauro Severiano Müller (1863-1926) began his military career in 1880. He was strongly influenced by the positivism of [Benjamin Constant \(1836-1891\)](#) and actively participated in the movement that resulted in the Proclamation of the Brazilian Republic in 1889. Soon after that, he became government officer of the state of Santa Catarina and federal deputy of the Constitutional Assembly. During [Rodrigues Alves' \(1848-1919\)](#) government (1902-1906), he assumed leadership of the Ministry of Transports and Public Constructions. At this point, he became very well-known for the reforms he implemented in the federal capital, such as the construction of Avenida Central, today

Avenida Rio Branco, and the modernization of Rio de Janeiro's port. He was nominated for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1912, where he continued work until 1917, when he was replaced by [Nilo Peçanha \(1867-1924\)](#).

## Müller and the Brazilian Politics of Neutrality

The major political question that occupied the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs under Müller was, undoubtedly, relations with the [German government](#) during World War I. When [Venceslau Brás \(1868-1966\)](#) was sworn in as Brazilian president on 15 November 1914, Europe was already at war and the Brazilian government had declared its [neutrality](#), since [Germany](#) was a major commercial partner. Diplomatic tensions began after a pronouncement of Ambassador [Rui Barbosa \(1849-1923\)](#) at the centenary celebration of Argentinian independence. Barbosa defended the new concept of neutrality, asserting that, with the increased internationalization of national affairs and the mutual penetration promoted by nations among themselves, war could not be restrained just to the belligerent states.

The German delegation in Rio de Janeiro, as reported by the Brazilian [press](#), demanded an explanation from the government about Barbosa's statement. The government immediately organized Müller's return from the [United States](#) and criticized Barbosa's speech in two separate statements, reiterating that [Brazil](#) should maintain the same friendship with all. Several documents and books attest that, like Barbosa, the majority of Brazilian intellectuals, mostly educated in [France](#), supported the Entente. The press and many intellectuals feverishly attacked Müller's position, accusing him of being a Germanophile.

## Müller and the Brazilian Declaration of War

There are many interpretations about the Brazilian motivation to declare war against Germany in 1917. Some explanations argue with the traditional policy of friendship with the United States, a continental solidarity; others use the argument that the political evolution from neutrality to belligerent state was provoked by German [submarines'](#) torpedo attacks on Brazilian merchant ships. In a variety of telegrams from 1917, as attested by the Itamaraty archives, Minister Müller continued to attest that the Brazilian government did not have any interest in involving itself in the European conflict and expected that the Germans avoid acts that would wound Brazilian sovereignty.

On 11 April 1917, Brazil broke diplomatic and commercial relations with Germany after the torpedo attack on the merchant ship *Paraná* on 4 April 1917. The historian Francisco Vinhosa affirmed that, after the attack, the press in Brazilian major cities tried to turn the public opinion against the Germans. On 16 April 1917, the pro-U.S. Brazilian League for the Allies organized a rally in Rio de Janeiro at which Barbosa declared that [Latin America](#) would soon be fighting side by side with the United States in defense of human rights.

The Brazilian government revised its policy of neutrality after Müller's resignation on 3 May 1917. On

5 May 1917, Peçanha took over the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and declared his unreserved support to the United States. On 22 May 1917, the Brazilian President Brás sent a message to the National Congress revoking the Brazilian neutrality. After leaving the Ministry, Lauro Müller occupied the 34<sup>th</sup> chair in the Brazilian Academy of Literature. He had been elected in 1912, but only assumed the position on 16 August 1917. Müller passed away in Rio de Janeiro on 30 July 1926.

Karl Schurster, Universidade de Pernambuco, Brazil

Section Editor: [Frederik Schulze](#)

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