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Brazil

Another world is possible, another Brazil is urgently needed!

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We publish below the theses proposed by the slate of candidates for the national leadership of the Workers Party (PT) presented by the Socialist Democracy (DS) Tendency.

We are now confronted with some positions that are decisive for the future of the PT and of Brazil. We will be selecting those who will lead the party during a critical period that is full of both challenges and possibilities.

We present the proposals of our slate to all the members of the Workers Party as an affirmation of the necessity for a new focus around which to build the leadership of the party and to renew it politically, practically and programmatically.

Globalisation of resistance to neo-liberalism

Since the late 1990s, the ruling class offensive throughout the world has been encountering growing political resistance. Mass revolts have occurred one after another in a number of countries, particularly in Latin America. Since the Seattle demonstrations at the close of 1999, the resistance has become international in scope. The increasing instability of the world economy, with its succession of crises, has undermined the legitimacy of the neo-liberal project and forced a certain change in terminology among those who are behind it.

Already, some significant victories have been won, although they are so far only "defensive victories". The so-called Multilateral Agreement on Investment - the most aggressive initiative of imperialist big business - was withdrawn from the agenda. The attempt to insert unfettered mobility of capital in the statutes of the IMF had to be suspended in the wake of the crisis that began in Asia in 1997. The efforts to open a new round of liberalization of international trade in the context of the WTO have been blocked since Seattle. These "defensive victories" are only provisional: big business still has the resources and the forces to resume, in various ways, the pressures to impose the rules that it has so far been unable to impose on the peoples of the world.

In Latin America, the major form taken by capital's offensive at this time is the attempt to form a Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA). In fact, what the United States is trying to do is to establish a protectorate over the entire continent. In response to this threat popular resistance is growing, as indicated by the demonstrations in Quebec City in April 2001.

A coordinated, consistent confrontation with the neo-liberal project depends on the transformation of the anti-globalisation struggles into anti-capitalist programs and political alternatives. How long it will take for this process to develop cannot be predicted, but it may, in the forthcoming period, acquire a much more sustained pace. The World Social Forum, held in Porto Alegre in January 2001, showed that there can be a convergence around such ideas as the concept that the world is not a commodity and that another world is possible. The Forum to be held in 2002 can represent a qualitative step forward in the resistance if it helps to go beyond the organizational and programmatic dispersion that now exists within the movement of opposition to neo-liberalism.

Socialism as a global, living and relevant alternative to Capitalism cannot be reduced to a form of economic organization; it is also the basis for the worldwide power structure and the type of society that today governs all human relationships. The brutal widening of the gulf between rich and poor continents, countries, regions and communities; the generalized increase in class inequalities; the erosion of social rights and democratic systems and

the development of new forms of exclusion and authoritarianism; the accelerated and brutal destruction of cultures and traditional ways of living of the majority of humanity; the reinforcement of religious fundamentalism; the aggravation of the ecological crisis, which already seriously affects the planet and compromises the future generations; the radicalisation of militarism, conservatism and North American imperial ambitions under the new Bush government are clearly demonstrating, to a growing number of political and protest movements and social layers, that we need to oppose this mode of production, this power structure, this culture, this civilization with a global alternative.

The alternative to the neo-liberal capitalist system is a socialism informed by genuine democracy, pluralism and self-management, respect for differences and the elimination of gender and racial discrimination. A socialism that includes the self-organization of society on the basis of human needs and solidarity as an effective reality in a world in which human beings constitute the parameters of ethical relationships. A socialism that includes respect for diversity and the resources available for the development of the creative potential that is unique to every individual. A socialism that includes the guarantee of genuine access to information, coupled with the necessary training for each of us to benefit as a truly free individual. A socialism that includes an intransigent defence of local cultures and the integration of the traditional knowledge of communities. A socialism that is informed by respect for the environment.

Day-to-day construction

While we have no desire to minimize the lessons of the international struggle of the exploited and oppressed, we say this socialist content has also been the most decisive lesson we have drawn from the major experiences we have had here in Brazil:

- from the practice of the workers when, in the course of their struggle, they build higher forms of organization, advance their unity and achieve political independence from the bourgeoisie;
- from the practice of mass participation throughout the country (in an outstanding way over the last twelve years in Porto Alegre), where the people have begun to exercise direct public control over the state. The left worldwide is now discussing the experience of the participatory budget. We are beginning to build a participatory democracy. Citizens are not restricting their participation in politics to voting on election day, but are developing an active citizenship in which - in contrast to the logic of a capitalist society - the distance between governors and governed narrows, technocratic prejudices are fought, and a new culture of participation and collective accountability in the treatment of public affairs is created;
- from the practice of radical struggle of the social movements, in which those who are excluded from society engage in direct action to transform the world and use their victories on their immediate demands to build elements of an economy of solidarity and become schooled in cooperation.
- from the practical experiences of the critical appropriation of the products of technical innovation, through control of the use of bio-engineered plants or generalized dissemination of free software, through gaining access to life-preserving drugs or the use of the Internet in the international organization of the struggle against capitalist globalisation. Davos and Porto Alegre represent two historical outlooks, two models of civilization and two opposed, antagonistic and irreconcilable social realities.

That is why, in light of these developments, the conditions in which socialism can be conceived as a theoretical and practical question, integrated within our daily life, are being assembled. In which socialism can be conceived as a process of permanent struggle for the hegemony of conscious and interdependent action, in which our past achievements will lay the basis for qualitative leaps and revolutionary initiatives, continually reinforcing the indissoluble relationship between socialism and liberty, democracy, feminism, equality and justice.

The structural impasse of neo-liberalism in Brazil

The FHC [Fernando Henrique Cardoso] government has rammed through a far-reaching reorganization of the Brazilian state, continuing a process that began under [Fernando] Collor [de Mello] and Itamar [Franco].

The prototype of the relationship between the state and the world capitalist market has been modified through the promotion of substantially increased rights for financial capital to the detriment of national sovereignty. Through the rescheduling of the foreign debt on permanently unfavourable bases, the radical dismantling of barriers to trade, the denationalisation of strategic productive and financial industries, the deregulation of capital flows, and the subjection of public expenditures to the objectives negotiated with the IMF, the country has abandoned control over a substantial portion of its capacity to determine its economic orientation in favour of financial markets. State property valued at some 30% of the GNP has passed into the hands of Brazilian or foreign capitalists.

The FHC government's renunciation of fundamental aspects of national sovereignty has gone so far as to convert the base at Alcântara (in the north-eastern state of Maranhão), into a service centre for launching U.S. satellites, under the complete control of the latter country. There has been a modification in the pattern of citizens' rights and mutual obligations. While the 1988 Constitution had pointed toward the universalisation of social entitlement, the neo-liberal reorganization has included a generalized attack on the fundamental rights of working people, and a disproportionate increase in the rights of property-holders.

The dynamic of increasing inclusiveness in the formal labour market that had existed since the [Getúlio] Vargas era has been broken. Social policies are now aimed at reducing social rights to the minimum, to social assistance directed to extremely impoverished groups, all others being redirected to the market. Wage-earners' taxes have increased, while capital gains have been protected from taxation. A new wave of subsidies in the billions, a veritable pillage of the public treasury, has been channelled toward the major capitalists including some multinational companies or recently privatised industries.

The neo-liberal reorganization has altered the very rules of the democratic game. A huge concentration of power in the central executive, control over the highest levels of the judiciary and the stripping of powers of the Congress (which has virtually lost its capacity to initiate legislation) have imposed a distinctly authoritarian model of management on the Brazilian state, with the concerted support of the mass media.

The social crisis, in part a result of the economic disaster, is evident in the serious deterioration of the labour market. Social expenditures have fallen. Urban violence exploded during the 1990s, and has already claimed more victims than the civil war in Colombia. Corruption has taken on explosive proportions amidst the degradation of the public sphere, the deregulation of financial controls, the clientelist nature of the government's base and the bureaucratic isolation of the major state economic agencies in a context of massive downsizing of the state sector.

Finally, the acceleration of the FTAA process is now producing increasing contradictions. The discussion on its implications, which until this year was almost non-existent, is beginning to spread, and it ought to be an important issue in the next elections, raising once again a debate on the national question and reopening, on another front, the discussion on the limits of neo-liberalism. This is an opportunity for us to strengthen the international movements that are challenging the size of the Third World debt and the need to pay it.

Crisis of the FHC government and the electoral contest in 2002

The impasse of Brazilian neo-liberalism is already threatening the very capacity of FHC to govern. The difficulties confronting the continuity of his power bloc are evident: its crisis is clearly deepening. FHC's popularity has been in freefall since 1999. This was clear in the 2000 municipal elections, with the indisputable progress of the left-wing parties and in particular the significant victory of the PT. 2001 has been characterized by the discrediting of the parties that support FHC. The calling of the early presidential election has resulted in one clash after another amongst the hitherto united majority.

The possibility of an institutional crisis cannot be excluded, with the development of the crisis in the Senate (whatever its outcome) and the moral disrepute of the Planalto [the seat of the Presidency] in the wake of the forestalling of the installation of the parliamentary committee of inquiry on corruption, the unending deadlocks with the Judiciary, the growth of mass discontent and the return of social mobilizations.

Furthermore, the relative economic upturn that characterized 2000 is now threatened both by international instability (as a result of its increased dependency, the Brazilian economy has become more vulnerable to the ups and downs of speculative capital) and by the crisis of electrical energy supply (an obvious result of the irresponsibility of the government and its privatisation project). And it is highly probable that the social situation, which is already catastrophic, will be aggravated by the attempts to disguise it. The governmental bloc will be unable to use the economy as a decoy to cover up its political demoralization, but in addition it will have to cope with new sources of unpopularity. There are greater possibilities of new and bigger victories for the PT and the left.

However, this overall vision of conjunctural difficulties and pressures on the government must be put into perspective. It must be acknowledged that the government retains a significant capacity for political initiative, as manifested in its continued parliamentary majority, its strong economic support and the support of its positions by the media. Its political centre is far from a state of collapse or powerlessness.

2002 has already begun

The FHC government is now seeking a candidate who can symbolize an effort at renovation on the strategic plane of the neo-liberal reorganization of the Brazilian state and carry out certain changes in its administration albeit without altering its foundations.

The bourgeois opposition parties, for their part, are seeking to build an identity and a project that can unify their various factions; Ciro Gomes and Itamar Franco are striving to express this movement.

The PT is the main beneficiary of the resistance to the neo-liberal program developed by the left and the mass movement. The party's candidate will be chosen in primary elections, the rules of which have not yet been established, but it is Lula who at this point seems to us to be the name most capable of expressing a mobilization of this scope and he should be the candidate of the PT. These forces that have been accumulated are by themselves insufficient, however, to produce a governmental alternative. Only the political and programmatic renewal from a socialist perspective of the Brazilian democratic and popular movement and of the PT can make its victory a possibility.

The PT is now leading an opposition to the PSDB and the FHC government that is clearer than it has ever been. It has overcome some major ambiguities, including in regard to the Itamar and Garotinho governments [in Minas Gerais and Rio de Janeiro]. However, the contrast between greater clarity in its political positioning as an opposition force and a lack of programmatic clarity in its definition as an alternative to neo-liberalism is starkly apparent.

The PT must keep neoliberalism, the federal government and the forces supporting it at the centre of its attacks. However, the party cannot leave the bourgeois opposition parties unscathed. We must denounce their limitations, their conservative promises and their inability to defend the interests of the vast majority of the nation. The PT and the democratic and popular movement must bring together the conditions to inflict a major defeat on the neo-liberal political camp in 2002.

The PT will be especially well prepared for this confrontation if it clearly defines itself as a defender of the workers' interests, of a democratic and popular program, and of a policy of left-wing alliances, and if it makes greater reference to a new socialist and internationalist perspective.

Carrying out the democratic and popular program

A breach has been opened for the Brazilian left to go on the offensive, defeat the bloc in power and take the leadership of the central government. To succeed in all these tasks, it is urgently necessary to unify the democratic and popular movement around a clear political line and action plan for the situation that will develop during the 2002 elections.

The major instrument for uniting the Brazilian left, expanding its base of political support as widely as possible, and constituting a broad mass movement that can defeat the governing bloc is the democratic and popular program. This program aims to go beyond the development model, social structures and political relationships that have long condemned the country to dependency and the tutelage of imperialist finance capital and the IMF, to economic crises, institutional deadlock and periodic episodes of authoritarian rule. That condemn the people to one of the most revolting distributions of wealth in the world, the domestic market to stagnation, the peasants to monopoly ownership of the soil, the workers to unemployment and super-exploitation, and the middle layers of the population to impoverishment; that deprives young people of any perspective and that forces a third of the labour force to live under the poverty threshold and condemns masses of people to a marginal existence.

The victory of the left means building a new political and social hegemony, opening the way to the coming to power of a new historic bloc and thereby creating the conditions for an open battle for power within Brazilian society, through the awakening to democratic political participation of tens of millions of individuals and their direct involvement in the establishment of a series of reforms in the peoples' interest.

This program can be carried out only in confrontation with the ruling class, and in particular the alliance of the major landowners, the financial oligopolies and international big business. The experiences we have already had in a number of PT municipal or state governments are proof of the viability of some of our proposals and make an ever-increasing contribution to the building of our forces.

Of fundamental importance as well are the struggles of the masses and their organizations and movements such as the Central Unica dos Trabalhadores [CUT - Central workers' organization], the Movimento dos Trabalhadores rurais sem terra [MST - Landless workers' movement] and the Central dos Movimentos populares [CMP - Coordinating council of grassroots movements], the World March of Women, and the effective actions of resistance to neo-liberalism such as the World Social Forum. But we must overcome the pragmatic temptation to consider these advances as a mere operation of accumulation of electoral forces; this would deprive the social movements of all their potential. On the contrary, the increase in their strength and their capacity for independent mobilization will broaden and deepen the conditions in favour of unity and victory for the masses.

A new state for a new country

We cannot synthesize these experiences unless we clearly develop a plan to reorganize the Brazilian state in accordance with democratic principles of socialist inspiration, i.e. on the basis of a non-liberal perception of democracy, based on a guarantee and expansion of rights (particularly those of labour), on a critique of the predominance of commodity rights, and on the constitution of a public sphere shaped increasingly by processes of direct and participatory democracy. A new Brazil is impossible without a culture that promotes the dignity of the public sector, without fundamentally and openly challenging the privileges of big business and the major landholdings, and without a reconstruction of social programs. On that basis, we will be able to build a new sustainable model of economic and technological development, of growth with distribution of wealth and reduction in regional inequalities.

Developed for a country of the periphery, our program must incorporate as central themes national sovereignty and support for the construction of a new international order. It must be conceived within a new anti-capitalist internationalist culture including an agenda that directly challenges the logic of submission to markets, supported by the struggles of the labouring classes and the World Social Forum. The rejection of the FTAA must provide an impetus to the resumption of a Latin American project that is not only independent of but opposed to American hegemony.

Looking to the future

Our slate is defined, in the first place, by its approach to the debate within the party. As members who are identified with the revolutionary imagination and the construction of a new type of society that goes beyond the capitalist order, we could of course draw up a lengthy inventory of differences with the policy that is predominant on the national level, beginning with a number of key values, extending to the critique of capitalism, and concluding with some pragmatic points of government, not to mention the general standpoint we should adopt on questions of strategy and tactics.

Pragmatism, electoralism and institutionalism are growing. Some depoliticised primary elections have frequently had a disintegrating effect and helped to destroy collectivity. The PT's internal democracy has suffered, among other problems, from the generalization of such practices as mass recruitment on an unclear basis and the adoption nationally of meetings with open polls throughout the day without discussion among the participants and based on members' transportation systems. These practices significantly distort representation in the party's leading bodies.

The party must prepare for the big challenges that lie before it and do justice to the great hopes that have been placed in it for two decades. Up to now, we have managed to grow through elections, in cohabitation with some archaic tensions, including certain features of the traditional formations. But the eulogies to lack of organization, institutional dilution, programmatic concessions and unclear alliances have gone on for too long and cannot help but prejudice our performance in more complex and demanding circumstances of the class struggle. However, we will not resolve these problems through a mere doctrinaire reaffirmation of principles, as important as those are.

Much has been achieved through the successful pursuit of another approach to politics, one that makes no concessions to our opponents, that promotes in deeds the development of the experience and political consciousness of the people, and that is consistent with our principles without being doctrinaire — whether in regard to municipal or state governments, our intervention in social or political movements or in the battle of ideas and the action of the party, or in Parliament. If we want to measure up to the challenges we face, we must take a qualitative step forward, generalize these approaches and experiences and transform them into a standard of conduct.

Another world is possible, another Brazil is urgently needed!

The PT must expand its internal democracy by promoting its forums for discussion; put greater efforts into training its cadres, and place greater reliance on the strengthening of the mass movements. It must reaffirm its role as a leading party by coordinating, articulating and initiating actions and experiences that enliven the democratic and popular camp, both as a movement and as institutions. We cannot allow the PT to be only a federation of political currents and groups. We want the party to go beyond the electoral contest, and this must be an ongoing task.

We are going into a decisive battle against huge forces, and in such circumstances the worst thing to do is to extol moderation, the illusion of conciliation, the loss of our socialist values, a lack of clarity in our political goals, the abandonment of the demands of the masses and a loss of consciousness of who we are and what we represent.

The broad masses will adopt the party's proposals only if they find in them some answers to their problems, the determination to confront the powerful, and the capacity to overcome obstacles. The party must stimulate the desire for transformation, build confidence in ourselves and encourage initiatives by the exploited and oppressed masses, in accordance with the idea that the emancipation of the workers will be accomplished by the workers themselves.