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Brazil

Crisis of the Workers' Party and divisions of the left

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After the expulsion in December 2003 of senator Heloisa Helena and the three deputies who had voted against pensions reform, the Workers' Party (PT) has seen the departure of hundreds of left activists, many of whom founded the Party of Socialism and Liberty (PSoL) in June 2004.

At the 5th World Social Forum (WSF) in Porto Alegre in January 2005 the crisis within the PT opened up again, highlighting the divisions among its left activists, who, while sharing a general criticism of the policies followed for two years by the Lula government, have drawn different conclusions.

[<https://www.internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/PSoL.jpg>]

Before the WSF, in December 2004, a meeting of the left of the PT was held in São Paulo at the initiative of the two principal historical left tendencies, Socialist Democracy (DS) and Left Articulation (AE). This PT left comprises militants who, while criticizing government policy as well as the submission of the party to the government, believe their struggle is located inside the PT and its government.

These militants, with other internal currents of the PT, have published a "Letter to Members of the PT", widely circulated during the WSF and organized a debate between party activists on economic alternatives. [1]

Two other initiatives had a significant media impact during the WSF.

More than 100 historic PT militants made a public proclamation "Time for a break", calling on party activists to resign collectively. This proclamation, initiated by the economist Plínio de Arruda Sampaio Jr., a founder of the PT and a "legendary historical militant" according to the press, and by Jorge Luís Martins, a member of the National Executive Commission of the CUT trade union federation, was signed by intellectuals, leaders of trade-unions and left organizations and social movements connected to liberation theology. They announced that they expected 4-500 PT militants to join them over the following weeks.

Questioned by the press, Jorge Martins explained that over the last two years the group thought it was able to turn the government to the left, "but we lost all the battles". "The pensions reform imposes more sacrifices on the workers, the laws on bankruptcy put an end to risk for capitalists and the high budget surplus deprives the government of the capacity to invest". Other initiatives, such as labour reform, are "more than obvious" signs that the Lula government looks to further deepen the model implemented by the former president Fernando Henrique Cardoso (FHC), Martins concluded.

For Sampaio Jr. the party "sank in an irreversible way" after it came to power. "Internal democracy [within the PT] does not function, the struggle is useless", he said. Questioned on the prospects for regroupment, Sampaio Jr. claimed to fight for "the unity of the left" and that he does not plan to join a party in the short run, although he felt close to the new PSoL. Some of the signatories of the proclamation had however already joined the PSoL.

At the same time more than 350 activists, independents and supporters of the Left Articulation, Socialist Forum and Socialist Unity Movement from all over the country published a proclamation announcing that they considered themselves "dissidents" within the PT and constituted a "public faction".

"The objective [of the PT] consisted in accumulating forces to establish a democratic and popular government of an

anti-monopolistic, anti-imperialist and anti-latifundist nature” says their proclamation “This government was to apply major reforms, aimed at satisfying the interests and needs of the great majority of the population, making possible a revolutionary rupture and the beginning of socialist construction, our strategic objective. Major deformations accumulated over the years. Little by little the struggle for spaces in the state apparatus became much more essential than the organization of direct social and working class struggles.

"Social activists were absorbed by the party machines, governmental administration, parliament and even by an institutionalization of the trade unions which ended in the transformation of what was a tactic into a strategic objective in itself... The election of Lula in 2002 was the climax of the strategic project of the PT - to be able to carry out popular democratic reforms through the federal government- and the climax of its conservative inflection which transformed governability and the possibility of maintaining oneself in the space occupied into an end in itself. Arriving in power with an ambiguous program, which promised changes to the people and the maintenance of contracts to the markets, Lula felt strong enough to ensure the continuity of the economic policy of FHC in a conjuncture of decline of popular struggles. This attitude gave a new breath to neoliberalism in Brazil. The Chavez government, in Venezuela, which rested on a popular organization much weaker than what existed in Brazil, showed that it was possible to confront imperialism and the dominant classes."

This group, joined by former Constituent Assembly deputy Plá-nio de Arruda Sampaio (the father of the aforementioned economist and also a founder of the PT), said he will no longer respect party discipline and will oppose “radically the policies of the Lula government which attack the rights of the workers (such as trade-union, labour and university reforms)” and that he will decide whether to leave the party at a national meeting next July.

Finally, in a text entitled “The star [2] will shine never again” 50 militants of the Socialist Democracy Tendency announced that they will leave the PT and join the PsoL. According to them, “the PT is no longer a socialist party”, it is a “party dominated by the bureaucracy and by corruption” and it no longer represents the social movements, having been “transformed into an electoral and institutional party” which is “a transmission belt of the Lula government."

They consider that “the PT left limits itself to being an “authentic” wing of the party and its membership of PT is only a factor of confusion for the workers and social movements” and that “the PT will never be again what it was during the 1980s”. “We have left the PT and we remain within Socialist Democracy, because we will never agree to mix things which are so different”: “We continue the DS, fighting to rebuild it as a current upholding the traditions and the programmatic heritage of the Fourth International”.

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[1] See the “Letter to Members of the PT”, IV 363, January 2005.

[2] The star is the symbol of the PT.