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Brazil

Against expulsions - Reply from the PT leadership

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The British socialist paper Socialist Resistance published a petition calling on the PT to halt its threat to expel Senator Heloisa Helena and three other PT members of parliament. The PT leadership made this response.

Dear Dr Noam Chomsky and other signatories

Time is short and the legacy is a heavy one

In relation to the manifesto published by the paper Socialist Resistance, according to which the PT is indicating to the international left that it has given up its tradition of democracy, pluralism and tolerance, I would like to say the following.

As you all know, to be tolerant it is necessary to know what is intolerable. And in the PT, today as always, everyone is free to express his/her opinions and the party's positions are the result of a clash of ideas. However, those who think that the PT is a debating circle or a social club are mistaken. On the contrary, it is a party that takes pride in its internal democracy as well as its unity of action.

That's why the PT has always guaranteed broad internal debate with the understanding that positions approved by the majority will automatically become the party's positions. It was like this in our beginnings, in 1985, for example, when party members decided that PT deputies were not going to take part in the electoral college that elected Tancredo Neves to the presidency. The PT had, at the time, eight deputies, three of them ignored the party decision and were expelled.

In 1993, Luiza Erundina, former major of Sao Paulo and who, at the time, held the highest public post the PT had up until then elected, accepted a ministerial post in Itamar Franco's government against the wishes of the party. She was suspended from the party while in office. The PT doesn't confuse internal democracy with lack of direction. If we are today the main political force in Brazil, it is because we have the merit of combining internal democracy with the defence of democracy as a universal principle and with the understanding that there is no party without unity of action. Freedom of expression yes, but not a state of chaotic indecision.

For us, freedom is not like a sea without limits. Freedom in democratic parties like ours means sharing and accepting these limits collectively. The PT is not a country. It is part of a multi-party political system. Probably, our dissidents, who've been traditionally in favour of exemplary punishments within the party, have a dream of the barbaric idea of a single party system. The PT prefers plurality.

We consider it malicious and slanderous to try to confuse the functioning of a transparent and democratic party with the political environment under a dictatorship. It's natural that those who agree with our policies stay in the party. It is also natural that, in a country led by the PT, everyone has the right to create their own parties. But it is not loyal to stay in the PT to combat it systematically from within, claiming to be guardians of the genuine PT virtues. In that sense, those that were expelled in 1985 acted in the right way. Instead of presenting themselves as victims, they joined other parties.

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The four members of parliament currently threatened with expulsion are clearly trying to present themselves as victims, when in reality they have committed an act of aggression by breaking with the internal unity, although they have every right to express their opinions inside and outside the party, as they have been doing. They prefer to exercise short-sighted and disloyal opposition to the PT government's policies. Perhaps because they don't have any proposals to offer themselves in the present circumstances, they put their efforts into discrediting the party before public opinion, fortunately without any success.

They live intoxicated with a sense of freedom without responsibility, complaining about both the difficulties and those who are facing up to them.

It is important to clarify that the pension reform, already approved by the chamber of deputies, and at an advanced stage in the Senate, has nothing to do with pressures from the IMF. It is a demand born out of the need for social justice, and is the result of a plan, adopted by the PT more than ten years ago, of creating a basic universal pension...

It is impossible to draw any comparison between the pension system in Brazil and those of Europe. The Brazilian system is a monster and it is difficult to imagine that anyone could be a left wing person in Brazil and seek to conserve it.

To give an idea, the general pension system in Brazil, which provides for 21,100,000 retired people and relatives of those who have worked in the private sector, received in 2002 17 billion reais as a subsidy from the state. While in the same year the public subsidy to finance pensions for 952,000 former federal employees was 23 billion reais. Official projections suggest that, without the changes proposed by the Lula government, in 20 years time this subsidy would reach 304 billion reais every year. This would certainly cause the system to collapse long before then. Furthermore, you should remember that 57% of Brazilian workers have no pension at all. The reforms proposed by the Lula government seek precisely to include these excluded sectors.

This just shows that the PT's dissidents made a lot of noise against the solidarity amongst public employees which is needed to assure a fair and dignified pension for all. The PT respects public employees and is aware that the great majority understand the aims of our policy.

Dear friends, the PT did not promise miracles and is not delivering miracles. We are, however, very much aware that we have been able to avert an imminent collapse of the Brazilian economy, which would not have helped anyone, not even our critics. We are sure we are holding on to and putting into practice our original and profound commitments to social change and freedom, at the pace and in the direction best suited to the present circumstances.

Under the leadership of President Lula, the PT has developed step by step. It does not encourage the illusions of impatience or insist on unnecessary differences - features which lead some on the left to become obsessed with infallible predictions and a fear of seeing the majority of the population benefit from economic development. This latter is a task that part of Europe and the United States already carried out at a high social and historical cost to the rest of the world. This economic development is maintained to this day by fierce protectionism and the selfish limitation of rights that prevents our development as a country and is at the root of these misunderstandings between allies.

Yours sincerely,

Paulo Delgado,

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