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Brazil

Raul Pont criticises the Lula government

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Former mayor of Porto Alegre (1996-2000) and theoretician of the participatory budget, founder of the Socialist Democracy tendency, Raul Pont was once again the Workers' Party (PT) candidate for mayor of Porto Alegre. He was opposed by José Fogaça, candidate of the Popular Socialist Party (PSP - the former Brazilian Communist party, which has gone over to neo-liberalism), who was supported by the whole of the Right.

Raul Pont was defeated, winning only 46.68 per cent of the votes in the second round. The PT thus lost one of its most emblematic cities, which it had governed for sixteen years. We publish here Raul Pont's opinions and statements as they were reported in the Brazilian press.

In its issue of November 2, the Porto Alegre daily *Correio do Povo* summed up as follows Raul Pont's press conference: "Raul Pont yesterday attributed his defeat to anti-PT feeling accentuated by the frustrations caused by the Lula government among the most active part of the population. He cited pensions, the minimum wage and the bank workers' strike. "To the anti-PTism whipped up by the conservative sectors were added all the disappointments flowing from the expectations of changes linked to the victory of Lula, changes that didn't happen".

According to Pont, the wrong direction was taken over pension reform and continued with the minimum wage and the taxing of pensioners, which frustrated a lot of people". "It's hard to admit, but I was shocked when Lula bought a plane for 70 million dollars and abandoned the workers", the PT candidate went on.

Pont insisted that while the party had increased its number of mayors, most of the cities and capitals won can't be compared to those that were lost. For him the result of the elections must be an alarm signal and should lead the party to rethink its policies. "We are losing our identity and when that begins to be noticed the first reaction of the electors is to turn to another party. We have also lost cadres and militants whom we could have done with during these elections", he indicated, referring to civil servants, bank workers and university teachers. His conclusion was that the government must take stronger measures so as to send a signal to the population that it hasn't forgotten its promises".

"The MP (of the state of Rio Grande do Sul) Raul Pont declared yesterday - wrote the *Correio do Povo* on November 15 - that the PT will have to have a serious and thorough debate in order to recover. He attributed his electoral defeat in part to the expulsion of the (federal) MP, Luciana Genro, to the pension reform and to the smallness of the rise in the minimum wage". "The defence of loyalty to our historic banners was broken, but we are going to radicalise the debate in the Convention in order to change the government's positions", warned the MP.

In its turn *Folha de Sao Paulo Online* wrote on November 22:

"The state MP Raul Pont (PT), unsuccessful candidate for mayor of Porto Alegre, told *Folha* today that the way Luiz Inacio da Silva governed was "shameful", "outmoded", "old" and "creating clientelism". Pont, who belongs to the DS (Socialist Democracy) tendency of the PT, on the left of the party, thinks that if he and the mayor of Sao Paulo, Marta Suplicy, had been elected, they could have helped to make the federal government behave differently.

The discussions with a view to reorganising the government to give posts to the party of the Brazilian Democratic Movement (PMDB) and the Progressive Party (PP, right-wing populist) having begun last week, Pont declared that he didn't believe the system of alliances that was being put in place was necessary".

Raul Pont criticises the Lula government

"I don't think that defeat should lead the government to broaden its alliances. In a country where the Executive is so imperial, the legislator's role is limited and he can't prevent the government from governing. The broadening of alliances or the search for governing with a majority is not necessary. It's the relations with society that have to change. That is not to belittle Congress. It's just that we have to establish other kinds of relations", said Pont.

A study worked out by Pont for the implementation of the participatory budget at federal level has already been sent to the government. "Some people treat these ideas as if it was some kind of adventure. However, we are trying to make ourselves heard. Two years have already passed with this kind of relationship of forces in Congress. And what has happened? Have we improved popular participation? We have confined ourselves to talking about this participatory democracy that we had always considered as insufficient, apart from the fact that it's obviously better than a dictatorship".

"Criticising the present policy of alliances Pont declared: "We are searching for a majority but is the only form it can take to sit down with the Brazilian Labour Party (PTB, a right wing party in spite of its name) or the PMDB? Is this the model? The method of sharing out the budget among the federal deputies - which existed when I was a federal deputy and which continues to operate - is shameful. It encourages clientelism. It's a form of government that is outmoded, old, that creates clientelism. That's why for my part, I go for more direct forms". According to Pont, "this policy of governability will only sharpen the conflicts within the party and subordinate the PT to the interests of the states, which will destroy us as a party".