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Brazil

The next fight will be harder

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Contrary to expectations, Luis Ignacio da Silva ['Lula', the candidate of the Workers' Party (PT)] was not elected in the first round of the Brazilian presidential elections on October 6, 2002. The polls, with few exceptions, indicated that he was likely to receive the 50% + 1 of valid votes necessary for a first round victory.

[https://npa31.org/IMG/jpg/04_LulaDutra.jpg]

Lula with Olivio Dutra

Beyond this, the more certain victory seemed, the more Lula tended to win broader and newer support, both from sectors of other parties whose members abandoned their candidates and from big entrepreneurs. Prominent bankers and the heads of large financial companies expressed support, or at least sympathy for Lula's candidacy. The press stated that some of them had been asked [by the PT leadership] to be part of the future government's economic team.

Finally, the PT tradition of peaking in the final days of the campaign, thanks to the mobilization of its activists and electorate, boosted hopes.

However, Lula did not win in the first round. With nearly 99% of the votes counted, he had won nearly 39 million votes, or 46.5% of valid votes and 41% of those voting. Thus, he must face a second round against the candidate of the government, José Serra, who won nearly 19.5 million votes, 23.2% of the total - in other words, around half Lula's total.

If we admit that the polls are reasonably close to reality, which seems to be the case, Lula's support did not increase in the last days of the campaign and indeed fell back somewhat. How can we explain this?

In the first place, by the impact of the televised debate between the main presidential candidates, organized towards the end of the campaign on October 3. Following a strategy mapped out with his advisers on 'marketing', Lula avoided confrontation with the other candidates: even when subjected to direct and repeated questioning, he avoided coming out for or against any given proposal (he had previously declared his mood to be one of 'peace and love'). Invariably he replied that the problem was complex, and that it should be resolved through a 'discussion with the whole of society'. The impression given was that of a candidate who feared difficulties.

Secondly, this time the traditional PT mobilization was much less strong, even with the possibility of victory. Over the years, there has been a decline in participation in the PT's campaigns (which has accompanied the transformation of the party increasingly into the hands of an apparatus of 'professionals'). On this occasion, the demobilization was sharper than before: the changes that Lula and the PT leadership majority introduced in this campaign were viewed with distrust. It is understandable that the activists of a party that always defined itself as socialist did not regard with enthusiasm the prospect of a government working in close collaboration with the big employers, friendly towards the bankers, and committed to respecting agreements made with the IMF.

Lula himself indirectly recognized these difficulties. In one of the last meetings of the campaign, in Sao Paulo, he said, "the militants of the PT can rest assured that I am going to fulfil the programme of the party". Such an affirmation would have been completely unnecessary in other campaigns.

In any case, the second round will be more favourable for Lula. He starts with a big advantage and should receive

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the support of the three other main candidates (Garotinho of the PSB and Ciro Gomes of the PPS). José Maria of the PSTU (a Trotskyist grouping of the Morenista tendency), who won a frustrating 0.5% of the votes (which can in part be explained by pressure for a 'useful vote' so that Lula could win in the first round) will also probably give his support.

Even more importantly, the elections showed an enormous willingness on the part of the electorate to vote against the government of Fernando Henrique Cardoso and its neo-liberal policies (to the extent that Serra, the government candidate, sought to present himself as a candidate for change).

On the other hand, it would be wrong to think that the election is all over bar the shouting; among other things, because it will be harder to maintain the strategy of 'peace and love' in the second round.