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Brazil

PT radical stays and fights

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At the very end of September, Heloisa Helena, the senator at the forefront of opposition to the Brazilian government's right-wing economic policies, announced she had no intention of walking out of the governing Workers' Party (PT). If the leadership really wanted to silence her, they would have to pay the price of expelling her.

[https://internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/35_hh.jpg]

Heloisa, who is a member of the Socialist Democracy Tendency (which organises supporters of the Fourth International in the PT), has been under pressure to stand in next year's local elections for Mayor of Maceio, the capital of her home state of Alagoas. The PT leadership postponed until the end of October the meeting that was to decide whether to expel Heloisa and three other members of parliament. This would be after the deadline for registering as a candidate in those elections and was widely seen as a manoeuvre to persuade Heloisa to leave the PT of her own accord in time to register under the name of another party. At least two other parties on the left had offered her their ticket. But the former teachers' leader, whose term as senator is now coming towards its end, has decided to stay and fight within the PT.

Heloisa spoke to Brazil's biggest daily newspaper, the Folha de Sao Paulo, about her decision.

Folha: By staying in the PT, have you given up standing for Mayor of Maceio?

Heloisa: I am not going to be dictated to by the electoral calendar. I'm putting my name down for the PT primaries, I want to stand for mayor, but I'm not going to do what they want. As a girl growing up in a poor family, I often had to enter by the back door. I've no intention of leaving by it. It's not my style. If they want me to leave, they'll have to go through with their show trial and point their totalitarian, neo-Stalinist finger at me.

Folha: Aren't you afraid of expulsion?

Heloisa: I was brought up out in the drought-ridden backlands of the Northeast, where you learn to live with solitude and hunger. The presidential palace cannot punish me for voting in favour of the positions we've defended for so long in the PT, and which have now been changed without any democratic debate. Those positions were decided by our last national conference.

Folha: Do you still believe in Lula's government?

Heloisa: In the first nine months the economic policy has been conservative and subservient to the markets, continuing that of the previous government. This could change. Not because the government itself decides to change, but because of the pressure of objective reality, because of pressure from the social movements and from many of the party's members. It may be forced to change.

Folha: What are you most disappointed about in the Lula government?

Heloisa: Being submitted to a process of expulsion while the government licks the boots of some of the biggest crooks in Brazilian politics. That really hurts. And I'm depressed by the huge chasm that has opened up between what we promised people when we were in opposition, and what we are doing now in government.