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Brazil

A popular victory

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1. The result of the elections of October 2002 represents a great shift in the relationship of forces in Brazilian society. The Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT - Workers' Party) won the Presidency of the Republic, electing Lula with 61% of the votes, and became the biggest party in the National Congress with 91 deputies and 14 senators. The victory of the PT was a popular victory and a serious defeat for neo-liberalism. The PT and Lula, on the basis of a history of identifying with the defence of popular interests, acted as catalysts for the desire for change. This process revives among the people the idea that elections can play a part in the confrontation between alternatives for the country.

[https://www.internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/14_Lula_in_victory.jpg]

Lula in victory

On the other hand, although we got through to the second round in various elections for state governor, gaining significant votes and winning in Acre, Mato Grosso do Sul and Piauí, we lost in Rio Grande do Sul. Moreover, the PSDB and the PMDB have won the governments of the majority of the main states of the country.

The shift in the relationship of forces represented by the victory of the PT is also limited by the alliances with rightwing sectors and by commitments to continue central elements of the economic policy rejected at the elections, expressed in the acceptance, albeit critical, by Lula and the majority of the PT leadership, of a supposed 'inevitability' of the maintenance of the agreement with the IMF and its consequences.

Another important aspect is the absence of significant mass social mobilizations in the recent period, although the campaign did bring about a broad political mobilization.

2. The elections open a new political situation in Brazil. On one hand, we have adverse international circumstances for the continuation of neo-liberal policies - worldwide recession, growth of protectionism in the countries of the centre, US interventionism and unilateralism, proliferation of rightwing nationalisms. Neo-liberalism has led a range of countries into deep crises, most notably Argentina, and is increasingly being questioned internationally. On the other hand, we have the cumulative effect of a decade of application of neo-liberal politics in the country, with disastrous economic and social consequences, growth of popular dissatisfaction, relative disarticulation of the elites through a period where a significant part of the national wealth changed hands and was denationalized, and disintegration of the block built around the government of Fernando Enrique Cardoso

The election took place amid a scenario of open crisis and the exhaustion of the neo-liberal model, and this deep national crisis will remain for a long time in the coming period. Following the defeat of neo-liberalism, different sectors, with distinct interests, are fighting over the best way out of the crisis, with no clear outcome in sight. The likely continuation of the existing conflicts in Brazilian society and the renewed potential for mobilization of the democratic and popular sectors, opens the possibility of strengthening of the socialist left.

The hegemony long established by the ruling class has suffered a blow and conditions are better to work for the construction of a democratic and popular alternative.

3. The character of the Lula government remains for the moment a great unknown. It was elected on the basis of huge expectations of change in the country, as the incarnation of opposition to the government of Fernando Henrique. But, on the other hand, alliances established in the campaign, decisions that damaged party democracy and declarations seeking to offer guarantees to the elites and to the 'markets', all pointed to a worrying continuity in

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the country's political direction. We already expressed these worries during the campaign. The character of the Lula government will be defined in the course of a process of social and political confrontation. The PT administration will face the question of how to guarantee a parliamentary and social majority for changes, having as its starting point the relationship of forces established by the electoral result and political struggle.

But, beyond tactical initiatives, strategic choices will have to be made - between strengthening the social base of the democratic and popular camp by applying our programme of structural reforms and making compromises with our adversaries; between governing on the basis of participatory democracy and governing in the traditional way; between moving forward to build a new hegemony or stopping, ambiguously and dangerously, half way along the road, with the risk of going backwards. Our challenge is to construct the choices that will be able to surpass the limits currently placed on the new government.

4. Conflicts central to the future of Brazilian society will be faced in the next period. The country has become very vulnerable to the speculative movements of national and international financial capital and the tutelage of the FMI has as its objective to preserve this situation, keeping the government hostage to the 'markets'. To regain autonomy of governmental action in the face of the markets and conditions for the exercise of national sovereignty must be the key strategic objectives.

This must be pursued on all fronts: deepening the shift in the relationship of forces through social and political mobilization, instituting mechanisms of participatory democracy and of public control over the movement of capital, confronting the situation of tutelage which the Brazilian State now faces. A series of strategic questions is already posed for the new government: agrarian reform, the affirmation of national sovereignty in the face of the FTAA, confronting submission to the IMF, regulation of the financial system and in particular the relationship of the Central Bank with the new government, the question of taxation, among others. In these questions what is at stake is the defence of democracy and national sovereignty against concessions of power, either to the US imperial state, or to speculative capital, otherwise known as the 'markets'.

It is necessary to face them taking account of the new political conditions that have opened up with the victory of the PT. They cannot simply be questions of government. They must be questions for the whole of society. We have to build a process by which an electoral majority is turned into a political majority that can legitimize and sustain a path of democracy and sovereignty for the country. To defend national sovereignty is to defend the essential condition for the exercise of popular sovereignty and genuine democracy.

5. The idea of a new social contract, presented in the resolution of the last National Meeting of the PT in Recife (at the end of 2001), emerged as a central theme in the campaign. It was presented as a call to all sectors of society for a pact in favour of production, economic growth and the development of the domestic market. The PT had always criticized previous proposals for social pacts presented by different bourgeois governments, that implied the submission of the majority of the population, that is, the subordination of social conflict to a supposed governmental rationality, that would establish what could or could not be demanded.

What we can and must defend is that a new social contract must be founded on participatory democracy and the existence of democratic spaces for negotiating and solving the conflicts that will result from the obligation of the new government to put an end to the historical marginalization of the interests of the majority. This is the process that can give a social character to the idea of nation.

6. The democratic and popular movement has embarked on an unprecedented historical experience that is decisive, from any point of view, for our future.

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The Socialist Democracy tendency of the PT considers itself integrally part of this process, sharing the challenges faced by the PT and the Brazilian left. We will intervene in the process underway to push the PT to link this decisive experience to the fight for the overcoming of neo-liberal globalization, of the tyranny of the markets and parasitic financial capital, the inequalities, historical exclusions and injustices that mark Brazilian society. Our perspective is to integrate this experience into a process whose horizon is the replacement of capitalism by a democratic and internationalist socialism.

7. The make-up of the Lula government is the immediate challenge; through our intervention in the bodies of the PT, we will seek to ensure this is done democratically, on the basis of the most advanced experiences of the party. The strengthened PT is today the main political force in Brazilian society. It should have its own say in the composition of its federal government. We believe, at the same time, that it is necessary to undertake, in the coming period, a renewed defence of the resolutions adopted at the last national meeting of our party. These have at their centre the ideas of breaking with the neo-liberal model, of development based on national sovereignty and the redistribution of income and power, and that the experience of a Lula government should contribute to the renewal of socialist values. They expressed the capacity of the party to formulate a strategic point of view that could unify it on the eve of a great political change. Preserving this capacity is more important still at this new historic moment.

8. The electoral result qualitatively changes the relationship of the PT to the state and affects the entire process of party building. The PT is growing, but is also becoming a more politically heterogeneous grouping. Its debates are followed by every sector of society. If governmental responsibilities demand prudence in the conduct of certain discussions, this should not hinder the democratic processes of debate and decision.

The Socialist Democracy tendency will intervene in the party's debates expressing its positions in a responsible, but clear, manner, conscious that diversity can and must be a source of strength in the construction of a movement that aims to challenge for power at all levels of Brazilian society. An even closer relationship between the party's elected parliamentarians and the dynamic social movements takes on a strategic importance in this construction, as does the defence of the autonomy of these movements in relation to the government.

If the PT in the electoral campaign was subjected to strong pressures from the ruling elite, the 'markets' and the governments of the metropolitan countries, in particular the United States, these pressures will increase with the party at the head of the federal government. But it is also true that the mandate from the ballot boxes gives us the legitimacy to carry through deep changes in Brazilian society.

Sao Paulo, November 3, 2002