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Brazilian Left

Left candidate narrowly misses presidency of PT

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The candidate of the left in the internal leadership elections of the Brazilian Workers' Party (PT) has failed to win the party presidency by just 3.2%. The final, official results of the second round run-off - announced on Thursday 13th October - gave Raul Pont, former Mayor of Porto Alegre and a member of the Socialist Democracy tendency, 48.4% of the vote.

Ricardo Berzoini, the candidate of the Majority Camp and close to President Lula, won 51.6%. The total number of PT members voting was 228,175 - just over 30% of the total.

The different left slates that supported Raul Pont in the second round are now negotiating with the Majority Camp the make up of the incoming party executive. Berzoini, who was the Lula government's Minister of Pensions when it pushed through a controversial pension reform in 2003, said he wanted to see an "executive of unity", in which all PT currents felt represented. He believed this would break with the domination of the party by a single dominant voice, and prepare the PT for the challenge of re-electing Lula in 2006.

Raul Pont also pointed to a new balance of forces in the PT. He indicated the small margin of Berzoini's victory, and the fact that although the Majority Camp has the largest representation on the new national leadership, all together the opposition slates elected 41 of the National Directorate's 81 members. "This gives us a new legitimacy on the leadership", he said. However, Pont added that he and his supporters had not yet discussed whether he should accept Berzoini's offer the post of General Secretary of the PT.

Exactly what course the PT should adopt now, following the devastating allegations of illegal party finances and political corruption in Congress, will be at the centre of the PT National Meeting scheduled for December.

As the party's new President, Ricardo Berzoini, himself a former leader of the bankworkers' union, insists he wants to develop "a new road fundamentally tied to workers' struggles, national sovereignty and democratizing access to basic rights".

But Valter Pomar, a leader of the Left Articulation current, who came in third place just behind Raul Pont in the first round of the internal elections, and supported Raul in the second round, says that "with policies like those of the last three years we cannot win the elections in 2006".

For his part, Raul Pont argues that if the party is going to hang on to its traditional supporters among the popular classes, there will have to be changes on a series of questions like the minimum wage, pensions and income tax. "There has to be a sign", he says. "It's not that we're going to solve all the problems before (the elections) next year. But it is essential that the government gives a clear sign of the side it is on, that it is seeking to advance its project."

In a communique released earlier, when it already looked certain that he had lost, Raul Pont elaborated further. "Whatever the result," he wrote, "we will continue to raise the same banners and ideals: the need for the PT to be autonomous from our government, to draw up a programme of economic and social development that recovers the PT's commitment to the majority of the population and makes possible the re-election of our project; the defence of the broadest possible internal democracy, of open debate and the elaboration of policies by party bodies and the active participation of the members; the necessary creation of a party Ethics Commission to analyse the accusations against party leaders, as the body that can both guarantee the accused their right of defence and defend the party

itself. It is with this commitment to renewal of the party that I want to invite all of you to take an active part in the party Congress, which will have the character of a true PT constituent assembly.”

While lamenting the fact that a number of MPs and other activists had left the PT to join the PSOL (see below) as “grave political error”, and one that had certainly damaged the chances of the left in these internal leadership elections, Raul Pont called for unity in action. “If our enemy is the right and the centre-right, if our greatest adversary is imperialism, he said, it would be a political mistake for the PT not to play its part as the biggest party on the left and act as a pole of attraction for the others. I have no problem calling on these parties. I know they have a very sectarian attitude towards the PT, but I don't think we should reciprocate.”

NB. Much of the information and quotations above are from an article by Verena Glass published by the alternative news agency Carta Maior on 14 October. The interview below with Raul Pont was published earlier by Carta Maior, at the beginning of the second round campaign.

INTERVIEW WITH RAUL PONT

Raul Pont, former mayor of Porto Alegre and a founder member of the Workers' Party (PT) says the second round of the PT's internal elections will not be a confrontation between those for or against the Lula government, but a debate on the policies which have led the PT into crisis. A deputy in the state of Rio Grande do Sul and a supporter of the Socialist Democracy tendency, Pont will participate in the second round of the elections, scheduled for October 9, against the federal deputy Ricardo Berzoini [\[1\]](#), a supporter of the majority camp.

Pont came second in the first round of voting, narrowly beating Valter Pomar, candidate of the Left Articulation. Now Pont prepares for a new struggle, with the challenge of unifying the left sectors of the party while countering the dissidents who threaten to leave the party and winning the support of the more moderate sectors in order to defeat the majority camp in the second round.

This represents a new political challenge in the life of this gaucho from Uruguaiana, who has been in the PT since the beginning. Pont began his political activity in the student movement in the late 1960s, when he was elected president of the Central Leadership of the students of the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul.

A graduate in history with a doctorate in political science from the University of Campinas (Unicamp), he taught political sociology and economy at the University. A state and federal deputy during the lifetime of four legislatures, he was also mayor of Porto Alegre, where he participated in the installation of the participatory budget.

[<https://www.internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/rp3.jpg>]

Raul Pont

A firm defender of popular participation as a policy of public management and the promotion of citizenship Pont is the author of books like “From the critique of populism to the construction of the PT”, “Short history of the PT, from the origins to the first congress, 1979-1991”, “Democracy, participation, citizenship - a left vision”. In 2002 he was again elected deputy in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, coming first among PT candidates and in second position among all deputies elected, with 69,453 votes.

In this interview Pont analyses the meaning of the confrontation with Ricardo Berzoini at a time when the PT faces the most serious crisis in its history. He rejects the polarization put forward by the candidate of the majority camp, according to which the confrontation in the second round will be between those who defend the Lula government and those who don't. “Berzoini is trying to create a tainted and fallacious debate” says Pont, indicating the tone of his campaign that will attempt to convince the majority of PT members of the need for a new orientation in the party.

Carta Maior: In your view, what is the meaning of the second round contest at a time when the PT is experiencing the most severe crisis in its history?

Raul Pont: One of the main conclusions that we can draw from the first round is that it was a demonstration of the vitality and strength of the party's activism.

The activist base responded to the appeal to take on not only the question of internal succession, but also to confront the campaign waged in recent months in the midst of the wave of denunciations of corruption, which has been transformed into a direct attack against the party.

Many of our adversaries seek to use this campaign to destroy the PT as a political force. And our militancy has given a vigorous response to this. Now, in the second round, we need to strengthen this mobilization and work to give a new orientation to the party.

How do you see the chances for your candidacy?

If we add together the six currents which are opposed to the majority camp, it amounts to nearly 170,000 members *1 who have come out in favour of these critical of the current leadership of the party and the manner in which the PT has carried out some of the Lula government's policies, in particular in the economic field.

These votes clearly express an aspiration to reorient the party and the government. We have criticisms, we want to correct these orientations, without leaving the party and without ceasing to defend the government. This has received massive support from the members and we believe this can be expressed in the second round. There is no guarantee that this will happen, but the conditions are favorable.

Will the decision by Plácido de Arruda Sampaio to leave the party, with a group of members of parliament and activists, undermine your campaign in the second round?

I believe this decision by Plácido, Ivan Valente and other comrades is a political error. It is a lamentable attitude because it takes the road of the breakup and atomization of the left and in no way helps to give a new orientation to the most significant experience that the Brazilian left has built.

That will do us some damage, but I believe that the majority of members who voted in favour of the candidacy of Plácido will remain in the party and will support us in the second round. For this reason I do not believe that we have lost the majority of these votes.

[https://www.internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/Ricardo_Berzoini.jpg]

Ricardo Berzoini

According to what has been announced up until now, the decision to leave the PT is limited to the APS (Socialist Popular Action). Broad sectors linked to the Catholic Church and the Socialist Forum and Socialist Brazil tendencies (who supported Plácido) will stay with us in the second round. But it is lamentable.

In several debates that we participated in for the first round, Plácido said that in the second round he would support the left candidate who polled the most votes. The other candidates in this camp made the same commitment. By leaving the party, he has weakened this unity.

How do you expect to overcome this obstacle and reorient the party?

We defend the unity of all the forces opposed to the manner in which the majority camp has led the party, with the objective of orienting the PT on a new road. In this goal we defend what we have advocated since the beginning: the calling of a party congress before the end of the year and we wish to carry through the process of evaluation of the irregularities which have been committed and the censure of those who have been responsible.

The congress is not only about updating our programme and preparing the party for the 2006 elections, but also defining a politics to turn around, in the short term the orientation of the government.

We want to change, for example, the policy that established a large primary budget surplus - a mechanism that ensures the transfer of a significant share of the economies made by the country to financial income.

We want to prepare the government and the party to face a second term. For this we say that we need a different policy of alliances to that practiced until now. We also defend the resumption of the strategic debate on the PT's socialism. We need to relocate the magnetic north of a utopia for our strategy. Without that, we are going nowhere. .

What will be your strategy for the second round campaign, which will be very short?

It's true, we have only a few days to campaign. I believe that it will be important at least to ensure a wide debate on a national scale, as in the debate before the first round which was transmitted by CBN. We will not have time to get to all the states.

We had the intention of getting to the states we could not visit before the first round, but we need to concentrate our forces on the main electoral colleges. It is not a strain.

For example São Paulo is the biggest electoral college in the country Berzoini's main strength is located there. Outside São Paulo, there are other big electoral colleges like Rio de Janeiro, Minas Gerais and Paraná, where the majority of party members are concentrated. In Rio Grande do Sul and Santa Catarina we can already count on the support of other left currents, like Left Articulation.

We need the support of São Paulo, Paraná, Minas Gerais and Rio de Janeiro, because these are the main electoral colleges. We have around a week and a half to do this and visit wherever possible.

Ricardo Berzoini has said the second round will be an election polarized between those who defend the Lula government and those who don't. Do you agree?

This is a false polarization. Berzoini is trying to create a tainted and fallacious debate. The question is not one of being for or against the Lula government. The question debated by the whole of the party is the crisis we are going through today. It is about whether the policy of alliances which has been adopted has yielded good results, and the reply is negative. That's what we should debate and respond to .

At the end of the day, has this policy of alliances been positive for the party? Has the governance built with these forces helped our government to realize the reforms and policies it advocated? It seems obvious it hasn't.

Today we are once more put in difficulties in the election of the president of the Chamber of Deputies.. And it is

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starting from this evaluation that we formulate our criticisms and make our balance sheet, not on the basis of this fallacious polarization.

The entire PT has elected the government and defends it. What we need to do is discuss how to make it advance and how not to repeat the errors which have been committed and which have cost us all dear.

Interview by Marco Weissheimer

[1] Ricardo Berzoini won nearly 122,745 votes in the first round. The figures for the other candidates were: Raul Pont 42,857, Valter Pomar 42,782, Plácido de Arruda Sampaio 39,096, Maria de Rosário 38,662, Markus Sokol 3,953 and Gegê 1,940. The six candidates who were not identified with the majority camp thus won a total of 169,290 votes. After the first round, Plácido de Arruda Sampaio - the only candidate who refused to support the Lula government - decided to join the Party of Socialism and Liberty (PSOL), while calling on those PT members who supported him and who have not yet decided to leave the PT to vote for Raul Pont in the second round. Valter Pomar (Left Articulation) and Maria de Rosário (Movimiento) also called for a vote for Raul Pont in the second round.