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Brazil/Chile

He was one of ours: Tribute to Túlío Roberto, victim of the Pinochet coup

- Features - In Memoriam - Obituaries and appreciations -

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It is difficult to realize today, fifty years later, the hope represented throughout the South American continent by the experience of Popular Unity in Chile. The arrival of the Allende government in 1970 opened a new page, a surge of optimism and the perspective of social transformation of the continent, in particular for Brazilian militants who had taken refuge in Chile to flee the Brazilian military dictatorship.

It was with this optimism that Túlio Roberto Quintiliano arrived in Chile in 1970 with a safe conduct from the Brazilian authorities as a political exile. He was 26 years old.

After 1968, the military government in Brazil hardened and established the most bloodthirsty and repressive regime of the dictatorship. In reaction to this, many left-wing political organizations were radicalizing their forms of action, defending the armed struggle by constituting armed branches within them and an orientation of politico-military struggle.

The Medici government modified the constitution to establish “order” at all levels of society. It created instruments of censorship and repression and founded intelligence organizations linked to the armed forces and the state. Union rights were suspended, military incursions into union headquarters were increasing, demonstrations were prohibited. Censorship of the media and of any cultural expression of protest was becoming widespread. Investigations and persecution of people opposed to the dictatorship were intensifying. Repression cracked down and state violence was at its height (rapes, torture, disappearances, murders).

In 1968, Túlio Roberto was a student at the Engineering School in Rio, he participated intensely in the youth protest movement at the university and became interested in politics, probably following the ideals of his father, Aylton Quintiliano, who had formerly been an activist of the Communist Party of Brazil. He was a journalist and writer, wisely recognized for his resolutely left-wing ideas [\[1\]](#).

Túlio Roberto chose to join the Brazilian Revolutionary Communist Party (PCBR). He became close to Apolônio de Carvalho, who had fought in the Spanish Civil War, been a resistance fighter in France, formerly a member of the central committee of the PCB and later founder of the PCBR. Túlio participated in demonstrations and political activities at the university, as well as in clandestine party initiatives.

In 1969, the police entered his home in the middle of a family dinner and took him away handcuffed, under the uncomprehending gaze of his mother. His ordeal at the hands of the military began. He was first detained in a prison in the centre of Rio, where he was tortured by electrocution for several days. He was then taken to a prison in Belo Horizonte, where he was also tortured. For four months, he went through nine army, air, navy and federal police prisons. He retained the physical and psychological consequences. The torturers wanted to extract from him the names of militants from the university and his political movement. They did not get anything. The soldiers released him.

Back home, Túlio Roberto began to work professionally on the construction of a continental road between Belém and Brasília. He did not know that his case had not been abandoned by the authorities and that a trial was underway. He was tried in his absence, without any defence, and received a prison sentence. Not wanting to relive the ordeal of incarceration, he decided to request political asylum at the Chilean embassy in Rio de Janeiro.

There he met another exile, Mario Pedrosa, one of the most important modern art critics of the 1940s in Brazil, founder of the Communist League, a member organization of the International Left Opposition (ILO), led by Trotsky in the 1930s. At the founding Congress of the Fourth International, Mario was elected to the International Executive Committee (IEC).

During the weeks of waiting before their departure for Chile, these two asylum seekers engaged in a series of political discussions, full of humour and directed at the very biased TV channels, which had been censored by the dictatorship. These moments deepened a friendship that would lead to the decision to live together when they arrived in Chile.

His experience in prison had solidified his resolve. Túlio Roberto would repeat incessantly to his wife, a few years later in Chile, that “it was the movement and the commitment of the masses which gave me confidence in my convictions, which enabled me not to denounce anyone, to reveal anything, never to betray our objectives!”. This confidence remained with him. His conception of the class struggle was based on the importance of the movement of the masses, in the struggle for his ideals.

Resistance in Brazil

The Brazilian left of the 1970s was marked by the Algerian liberation struggle from French imperialism in the 1960s. It was impacted by the appearance of the 26th of July Movement, the guerrilla movement which overthrew the dictator Fulgencio Batista in 1959, with Fidel Castro and Che Guevara at its head. The Cuban revolution greatly influenced the history of socialism in Brazil but also in the entire Latin American continent. Régis Debray’s text “Revolution within the revolution, armed struggle and political struggle in Latin America”, written in 1967, also influenced a whole generation of political activists, dreaming of revolution and the overthrow of the dictatorship in Brazil. This context stimulated debates and breaks from the stageist or legalist conceptions of the traditional left parties. One after the other, these parties suffered splits.

The Brazilian Communist Party (PCB), the Communist Party of Brazil (PcdoB – a Marxist-Leninist party), but also the Revolutionary Political Workers’ Organization (POLOP – a Trotskyist organization) experienced divisions which resulted in the formation of new movements and organizations. Most of their leaders abandoned the work of building organizations among the youth and among workers to devote themselves to their organizations and to implementing the armed struggle. They broke away from the struggles of the working class like that of Osasco in the state of Sao Paulo or that of Contagem in Minas Gerais [2]. During all these years, all parties and organizations had to conduct any form of action and activity in conditions of total clandestinity.

The new organizations – the Revolutionary Movement of October 8 (MR8), the National Libertarian Alliance (ALN) and the Popular Revolutionary Vanguard (VPR) organised four kidnappings of ambassadors – from the United States, between 1969 and 1970. [3]. Their declarations justified these actions, with the objective of freeing comrades in prison in exchange for the ambassadors, to force a stop to the tortures... Carlos Marighela, founder of the ALN, defined the guerrilla war as the only possible combat against the dictatorship and as a triggering factor of revolutionary consciousness in Brazil. He was inspired by the theoreticians of “foquismo” that “one should not always expect that all the conditions are met for revolution”, as Che Guevara said in his *Guerrilla Warfare*.

Since joining the PCBR, Túlio Roberto had been convinced by the importance of the mass movement, in which he participated intensely, and opposed with determination the vanguardist politics of these new organizations. Founded in 1968, the PCBR theorized the articulation between the rural guerrilla and the mass work in the cities to succeed in constituting the Revolutionary People’s Government, whose anti-imperialist and democratic tasks should open the

way towards the socialist revolution. Influenced by the road of the armed struggle, without defending the “foquist” theories, the PCBR structured its apparatus in the armed sector (kidnappings, bank robberies...) and the political sector (participation in mass movements in universities, in factories ...). But the difficulties of clandestine intervention in these sectors also led this party to a “vanguardist” drift of underestimating interventions in workplaces, universities and different activities.

The armed actions of militant cadres produced no effect in the evolution of the consciousness of the proletariat, much less the mass involvement of the working class in the actions of resistance to the Brazilian dictatorship. It was precisely this reality that convinced Túlio Roberto that these actions were a false road to the overthrow of the dictatorship in Brazil. This conviction would accompany him to his arrival in Chile.

Chile, laboratory of the Latin American left

Arriving in Santiago in October 1970, Túlio Roberto was invited to work for the Allende government, with the Agrarian Reform organization. At the same time, he sought to make contact with the countless Brazilians who were also refugees from the Brazilian dictatorship, but especially his companions from the PCBR, who were critical of the militarist and vanguardist methods of Brazilian political organizations. He then suggested that they debate, in order to produce discussion texts intended for the exiled left. But it was above all the series of kidnappings of diplomats in Brazil by the new organizations which would trigger in Túlio and his comrades the desire to structure a group of activists from Brazil with the aim of influencing the debates within the Brazilian community present in Santiago. The group would be called Ponto de Partida, the “Starting Point”.

Already very open to critical ideas concerning Stalinism thanks to discussions with Pedrosa, Túlio began to immerse himself in Trotskyist literature. A Brazilian refugee comrade, who would become his wife, and who was invited to take part in this group, suggested contacting an organization “not very well known, but very interesting”: the Chilean section of the Fourth International.

Following his arrest in 1969 in Brazil, the sociologist Fábio Munhoz, a critical activist of the Trotskyist Revolutionary Workers’ Party (POR-T), a party linked to the Fourth International, arrived in Santiago. He wanted to meet the Brazilians of the Ponto de Partida group. Túlio and Fábio wrote a discussion text intended for the Brazilian left exiled in Chile. The document “About a kidnapping in Brazil” provoked a shock in the Brazilian community in Chile.

This text went against the grain of the ideas and practices of the community of the new generation of activists and had a significant impact. But being very ill, Fábio preferred to return to Brazil, where he died very shortly after his return.

The political reality in Chile emerged as the antithesis of the vanguardist ideas of the defenders of the armed struggle as the only way to overthrow capitalism. This process seemed to be following a dynamic similar to the Bolsheviks’ experience which could culminate in an insurrection, despite the proclamation of a “Chilean road to socialism” by Allende and Popular Unity going through respect for the existing institutions.

Mario Pedrosa used to speak of the process in Chile as “a true laboratory of class struggle in Latin America”. Debates proliferated within the Latin American left present in Chile, between the Brazilian refugees marked by Cuban theories of armed struggle, the Stalinists convinced that the process of change through elections was more than viable, and the centrists who wavered between one or the other of these conceptions. Indeed, they all observed with profound attention the increasingly radicalized dynamics in the country in which they had become politically active.

The Brazilians met comrades of the Fourth International section, represented by the Peruvian Virginia Vargas, today a well-known feminist, and Jean, her companion.

The Fourth International had just held its Ninth World Congress in 1969. Debates within the sections were developing. The majority resulting from the world congress was under the influence of the vanguardist orientations of Débray and the majority of the so-called Guevarist organizations, including the PRT, Argentinean section of the Fourth international. The Socialist Workers' Party (SWP) of the United States was in the minority but maintained constant contact with organizations in Latin America, as well as with Europeans – particularly the French and Italian sections. The two tendencies competed for the sympathy of the militants of Ponto de Partida, due to the importance that it represented for the Fourth International to build a future section in Brazil.

A new process of discussion began and innumerable meetings were held with the various European leaders, and those from the United States and Latin America: with the Chilean Raul Santander, Marxist intellectual and historian, with the Bolivian Hugo Gonzales Moscoso, historic leader of the Revolutionary Workers' Party (POR), with Livio Maitan and Jean-Pierre Beauvais (both belonging to the majority of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International), with Peter Camejo leader of the SWP, passionate defender of the minority positions, etc.

Peter Camejo, very enthusiastic about the document by Ponto de Partida, critical of the new Brazilian vanguard, published it in *Intercontinental Press*, magazine of the Fourth International, and wrote a commentary article on this text, in *The Militant*, newspaper of his party, the SWP, and used it extensively to combat the vanguardist positions of the majority. [4] Conversely, the (European) majority of the Fourth International never informed or published any article on the debates between the leaders of the Fourth International and the Brazilian group.

Alongside these debates, Túlio produced various discussion texts aimed at exiles arriving in Chile. He promoted meetings with comrades in deep disagreement with the methods of armed struggle to the detriment of the mass movement and began to take an interest in the process of the Chilean class struggle.

A determined commitment

As early as 1971, the year the document was published, the Ponto de Partida group quickly found itself in the middle of two blocs emerging from the Ninth Congress of the Fourth International – the battle between the Europeans, influenced by the Cuban revolution and by Latin American guerrillas (the majority), and the Americans (the minority) defenders of the revolutionary struggle rather beginning from mass struggles.

In this intense period, Túlio Roberto read Marx, Lenin and Trotsky and discussed with many intellectuals residing in Chile. He had a long discussion with Francisco Weffort, Brazilian and former teacher of Fabio Munho, about the nature of the USSR. He adhered to the thesis regarding the USSR as a bureaucratized workers' state and not as a socialist state capitalism, as Weffort asserted.

The Ponto de Partida (PdP) group was becoming an important centre of discussion, especially with the new wave of Brazilians who had arrived in Chile. It maintained relations with the representatives of the two tendencies of the Fourth International who passed through Santiago, on the situation in Chile, on the positions of Brazilian organizations, on international political events. Both the majority and the minority of the Fourth International wanted to build a section Brazil from the PdP group.

Chile became the centre of interest of the Latin American and international left. Political refugees from different

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continents were increasing in number and were integrating into the Chilean process of change. Organizations and political parties were divided between those who believed that the “peaceful road to socialism” would lead to a change of society, and those who did not manage to generalize sectoral struggles to the whole of society. Neither side presented a programmatic or transitional proposal for the transformation of the system.

During this period Túlio Roberto became increasingly interested in the workers’ struggles of the new structures of dual power: the *cordones industriales*. He was enthusiastic about this experience!

In Chile, class polarization deepened, the process was radicalized with the employers’ offensive by means of a paralysis of truck transport (known as the “truckers’ strike”), or by the organization of a shortage (“boycott”) of foodstuffs and basic necessities. Faced with this, an unprecedented and spectacular response emerged for these young Brazilians from the PdP who had heard of “dual power” only in meetings and in though various readings: the appearance of the *cordones industriales*. They were organized by workers located in factories in different sectors of Santiago, but also in more than a dozen important provinces of the country. Militants of the Socialist Party, the Communist Party and the MIR (Movement of the Revolutionary Left) broke from the orders and “party discipline” because workers’ control of the factories became their priority. Requisition of abandoned industries, recovery of account books, organization of production were decided in general assemblies. The “orders” of the parties were irrelevant, the priority was collective decisions.

All power was concentrated in the hands of these workers, who immediately felt the need to structure themselves and expand their movement, not only in the factories, but also in the neighbourhoods and *poblaciones*. Authentic self-organization was built and reinforced the prospect of new relations of production.

The bourgeoisie then abandoned its “strike” and “boycott” offensive to concentrate on the preparation of a coup d’état. In June 1973, the soldiers of the “Tacna” regiment rose up, but the “Tanquetazo” failed.

Popular Unity did not believe in the determination of the bourgeoisie not to give in to the interests of the workers and the government did not prepare the population and even less the movements for the slightest military attack. Concessions were made to the bourgeoisie on the initial programme relating to social measures, and declarations of confidence in the armed forces issued.

During 1972, the PdP group defended the Trotskyist theories of the need for an international tool – a political party to act for the transformation of society. Influenced by the discussions with Peter Camejo, ardent defender of the positions of the minority of the Fourth International, and by the eminently political interventions of Raul Santander, their militants decided to approach the Fourth International. They then initiated a process of discussions on the priority of the moment: to participate and amplify the revolutionary process in Chile or to prepare the return to Brazil of the refugees to build a new party.

The class struggle in Chile encouraged Túlio Roberto’s growing desire to engage in this process. A debate took place within the group, which ended in a split. One part decided to focus on building a Brazil-oriented organization. Túlio defended another perspective of building a new and miniscule party of the Fourth International, the Socialist Revolutionary Party (PSR), which decided to close the chapter of entryism within the PS and try to integrate into the mass struggles with the hope of influencing this process.

The PSR and its militants engaged in action within the *cordones industriales*, where they could contribute with the workers to consolidating their structures. The Latin American revolutionaries of the Fourth International living in Chile then decided to join the PSR, and intervened with the aim of participating in the resistance of the masses.

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As a member of the Fourth International, Túlio Roberto chose to give his all to the extremely rich Chilean process, alongside Hugo Blanco (a Peruvian leader of the Fourth International), with the hope of a workers' response to the attacks and the second coup attempt. [5]

At that point the PSR had no illusions about the intentions of the bourgeoisie which wanted to overthrow Unidad Popular. On 1 September 1973, it published a declaration about the confrontation between the classes [6]. The declaration began with the observation that the national political situation was at a crucial turning point towards a definitive solution of the question of power. It noted the incapacity of UP to respond to the needs of the proletariat. Analysing the attacks of the bourgeoisie, on the state and the intentions of US imperialism and the right the statement concluded "It is these social and political factors that make the solution to the question of power, of spreading the revolutionary process, and of the triumph of that process possible only in the arena of armed struggle."

On 11 September, Túlio Roberto was going to work as the sounds of car horns filled the streets where Santiago's luxury shops were located. A bomb exploded on La Moneda, the presidential palace, very close to Túlio's place of work. He understood what was happening and went back home to find his companion and think about what to do. It was impossible to escape the control of the neighbours, accomplices of the coup, who as soon as he arrived home, threatened him with death if he did not come to the lunch to celebrate the coup.

The next day, a military patrol rang the doorbell of his house. Realizing that they were a target of the military, Túlio took his partner in his arms and announced to her: "I don't know what they are going to do, but this time, I will not deny my convictions, nor who I am". The soldiers invaded the house and searched it completely, then took the couple to the Military School. His companion was released and Túlio was taken to Tacna, where the putschists were, with two Uruguayan Tupamaros and members of the GAP – Group of Friends of the President, Allende's close guard. Túlio never returned, his body was never found. [7]

Since then, his companion, his relatives, his friends, have not stopped looking for a clue, a trace of him. Reported missing, he was forgotten...

This year 2023, marked by the fiftieth anniversary of the end of Popular Unity, a group of Brazilians are paying tribute to Túlio and the others who disappeared and were murdered, victims of Pinochet's military dictatorship. A commemorative plaque will be placed in Santiago. So as not to forget. [8]

An astonishing particularity of the trajectory of this revolutionary is that his organization, the PSR, was never cited in the countless analyses, descriptions and criticisms of the European sections of the Fourth International, and even less the information about the death of the one of its militants... Only the declaration of the PSR alerting on the urgency of the armed preparation of the resistance, was published by the former minority, the SWP, the former section of the Fourth International in the United States. [9]

Following the split of PdP, certain members of the group that chose to build a new party in Brazil ended up passing through Argentina, and met of Nahuel Moreno. Many years later these members founded the Unified Socialist Workers Party – the PSTU of Brazil. Some of its militants, fellow travellers of the PdP group, paid tribute to Túlio by interpreting his history as if he would have been one of the founders of the PSTU because he was a founder of PdP.

A bitter taste persists at the mention of this outstanding revolutionary!

The PSR, a political tool bringing together FI exiles in Chile, fully participating in the Chilean process, member of the Fourth International, is not remembered. Nor is the violent repression suffered by its militants...

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Discreet and determined, the Fourth International also has its heroes!

Tulio Roberto, presente!

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[1] Aylton Quintiliano wrote several works, among them *A Guerra dos Tamoios* Ed. Reper, 1965. Quintiliano described the first indigenous resistance movement, its habits and customs, and demystified cannibalism and the hostility of these peoples. He is also the author of "Caminhos da Esperança", 1959 Livro do Solar. *Renegados um Romance de Vida Real; A Grande Muralha; Grão Pará: Resenha Histórica*; "Right to live" (poetry) and *Estrada do Sol*.

[2] In 1968 there was a militant workers' strike in Contagem in Minas Gerais. It challenged the bases of the politics of the time: the movement took place without the presence of the "yellow" trade union, in the workplaces, which caused fear in the state and in the bourgeoisie. This was a movement led by dissident organizations from the PCB. It showed that trade union resistance was possible even in times of dictatorship. Contagem had an impact on workers in Osasco in 1968. They decided to go on strike. The self-organization of Osasco emerged as an example for the Brazilian trade-union movement. The experience of Osasco showed that without being structured by every section of every factory and in the neighbourhoods, the strike could not last, let alone become a general and coordinated workers' uprising. It demonstrated that a factory occupation calls into question who is responsible for the factory, and that to occupy one must prepare a "strike environment" and a solidarity network in favour of the occupation.

[3] Silva, Carla Luciana, "Sequestros e terrorismo de Estado no Brasil: casos de resistencia revolucionaria", *Izquierdas*, 49, October : 1669.

[4] Ponto de Partida, "[Concerning a Kidnapping in Brazil](#)", *Intercontinental Press*, 29 March 1971. Camejo, Peter, "[Brazilian Marxist View of Kidnapping](#)", *The Militant*, 3 April 1971, Volume 35, Number 16.

[5] The first was on 27 June 1973: an armoured regiment, with the help of the neo-fascist group Fatherland and Freedom stormed the centre of the capital. The same day, generals Carlos Prats and Augusto Pinochet neutralized the putschists.

[6] Declaration of 1 September 1973 on the confrontation, "[Statement by Chilean Revolutionists Prior to Coup](#)".

[7] You can find this information [here](#).

[8] See [Memorias da ditadura](#).

[9] *Intercontinental Press* also published the news of his death on 10 December 1973 "[Brazilian Trotskyist Murdered by Chile Junta](#)".