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Brazil

**âEurosoeThe main immediate
challenge for the anti-capitalist
left is to contribute to the
development of the
movementâEuros**

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This interview was conducted by Juan Tortosa of the Swiss journal Solidarité S on 23 June 2013. Additional questions were asked on 27 June 2013.

From Europe the protests are hard to understand, since, aside from the higher public transport prices, isn't it the case that there is today an economic and social situation in Brazil in full development? What do you think? Is this a manifestation of the middle-class that does not feel represented?

The truth is that the idea that there is an economic and social situation in Brazil of full development is false. The federal government tries to pass off that idea, and it is in the interests of the international bourgeoisie (and its mass media) to pass off that idea, but it is not true.

It is true that under the Lula government there was more growth of the economy than under the FHC government. But we look at this in the historical context of Brazil, or if we make the comparison with the whole of the world, Brazil's growth is very mediocre. The growth rate of Brazil in the last ten years is one of the lesser rates in Latin America, it is less than the growth of the other called "emerging" countries and so on.

In addition, in both years of the Dilma government for which there is already data growth has fallen even more: 2.7% growth of GDP in 2011, and 0.9% in 2012. In 2013, in spite of the previous hopes of the government of a big recovery, the data already indicate that growth will again be mediocre. Of course this is explained, in a good part, by the reflection of the bad situation of the world-wide economy (in the same way that a good part of the better results of the Lula government is explained by the international boom in commodities, impelled above all by China), but the point is that there is no process of significant economic growth in Brazil.

If we think in somewhat broader terms, more in line with the hypothesis of "development", the evaluation is still worse. In the last ten years, Brazil has regressed from the point of view of its industry "there is a deindustrialization process - and above all from the point of view of its external economic relations. It has become an exporter of commodities, it has been exporting less industrial products than for 20 years. At that level, its dependency on the outside has increased.

But the problems from the economic point of view go still further. In recent months there has been a renewed process of inflation - limited, but perceivable (something around 6% in the year is expected). At the same time, there is a deterioration of the trade balance (explained, partly, by the over-evaluation of the real - the Brazilian currency - which is imposed in the name of control of inflation). Weak growth, with inflation and deterioration of the trade balance is a combination of circumstances that restricts much the margin of manoeuvre of the government. And as it is a very conservative government from the economic point of view, what it tries to do is to more forcibly control public spending and to give incentives to capital - with, until now, very little result.

There is an aspect of the question with which I agree more. It is clear that the mobilizations are not only explained, and perhaps not even mainly explained, by the relatively bad present economic situation (although the price of public transport really is high in terms of people's purchasing power). The indignation against the repression of the demonstrations, support for the right to demonstrate, as I have already mentioned, has an important weight.

And that also has an important weight on what the question suggests, I would not raise it as "the middle-class does not feel represented", but more as a lost general legitimacy of the political system. A great

part of the population feels that the majority parties have policies which are very similar (which has been expressed clearly, for example, by the fairly similar and in general common performance of both the politicians directly responsible for the question of public transport in Sao Paulo, mayor Fernando Haddad, of the PT, and governor Geraldo Alckmin, of the PSDB).

It is true that the federal government has had clear majority support in recent years, and in particular in the elections. But there were surveys published shortly before the beginning of the mobilizations that have pointed to a significant fall in that support. And the sector that supports the government least is exactly the intermediary wage earning sector (a part of the proletariat, of course). The government has greater support among the more precarious wage earners, among the poorest, the sector that some analysts call "Eurosoethe sub-proletariat" Euros . But even a part of that sector has rebelled "Euros" starting precisely from the initiatives of breaking into shops and banks, burning cars - and certainly feels exploited and oppressed.

Which are the social sectors that dominate the economy? Has the economic growth of Brazil benefitted society as a whole?

The Brazilian economy is dominated by an alliance between financial capital, big industrial capital and agro business (the big rural bourgeoisie), in all cases both national and foreign, with some contradictions among them. For industrial capital, for example, the policy of over-valuation of the real creates problems, because it makes it difficult to compete with imports. But as this capital accepts the neoliberal general framework of the economic policy of the government, it does not have much margin to make pressure for changes in the policy.

The economic growth of Brazil in the last years - which exists, although it is much less significant than is claimed by the propaganda of the government and the praise they have received from the international bourgeoisie - has benefitted mainly financial capital and agro business. But something has been distributed also to the poorest layers of the society, mainly by the big growth in social assistance (most important at this level is the well known "EurosoeBolsa Familia" Euros programme) and also by the significant growth of the minimum wage (what also has implications for which those who receive pensions, which are indexed to the minimum wage). That is the big reason for the greater support the federal government has among the poorest layers.

In addition, although the situation of public education is in no way good, the federal government has expanded federal university public education and has a policy of bursaries that has extended the access of more popular sectors to private university education.

Intermediate wage-earners and those that receive higher wages have lost out, especially public employees. That is one of the reasons why those in what can be classified as average layers (this includes a part of the proletariat, including workers) have a much more negative opinion of the government.

Sectors like farmers and indigenous peoples (who are not numerous in Brazil) have also lost out as the government favours agro business, and not peasant agriculture. The federal government has allowed a real genocide of indigenous people - there are many murders of natives carried out by the great rural proprietors, and the federal government tolerates it as the big rural proprietors (agro business) are an important part of the political alliances made to guarantee so-called "Eurosoegovernability" Euros .

What balance sheet do you make of the PT in power?

I believe that it is possible to summarize the line followed by the PT governments as follows: to give something for "Eurosoethose at the bottom" Euros , on condition of not entering into any clash with the dominant classes, which

implies not making any fundamental change of direction in the neoliberal policy supported by those classes. It is a fundamentally conservative orientation. The economic situation is feasible enough to allow, with the growth of the economy, giving something to those at the bottom without taking anything from those above, and the strength of Lula, the PT and the organizations it leads was able to contain the demands of the workers and oppressed layers of society.

Lula seems to believe, and the PT seems to be convinced by him of this, that is possible to govern (more or less) for all, replacing the class struggle by negotiation (mainly with those at the top) and control (for those at the bottom, when negotiation is not sufficient).

At some time - as seems to be beginning to occur - that line will have to exhaust itself. In the end, the PT governments have not eliminated the violent contradictions of Brazilian society, nor the dependency of imperialism, nor the contradictions of capitalism. And the control on the part of the PT and of their allies, and the organizations directed by them, over the demands of those at the bottom, cannot be eternal.

This line has debilitated the workers and popular movement "Euros" which will remain the case for at least a few years, until they can be reorganized. To the PT that seemed until now secondary, because it relied on electoral strength, extended by the broad alliances with the right that it has been making.

There are other aspects of the government line that are very negative. One that should be emphasized is the contempt for environmental questions, reinforced by the alliances with the agro business sectors. Another is the opening of space for the religious fundamentalist right, also reinforced by the importance that it has in its apparatus of alliances.

When and how were the protests born? What are the demands?

There are many different and even contradictory demands, that have emerged at different moments. But we can consider that the centre of the movement has been the city of Sao Paulo, and that the demand that lay behind the mobilizations has been for the revocation of the increase in the price of the urban transport, from R\$3.00 to R\$3.20.

The first demonstration was on June 6. There were two more demonstrations, they were growing, but nothing extraordinary, some thousands of people. On June 13 there was a bigger demonstration, of more or less 15,000 people, and this time there was stronger police repression than in previous demonstrations. There were than 250 people arrested, and a few dozen hurt by rubber bullets or batons. Various journalists were arrested or hurt. A photograph of a journalist injured by a rubber bullet in the eye was widely disseminated.

It was from there that the great growth of the mobilization in Sao Paulo and the nationalization of the movement took place. And in the following demonstration in Sao Paulo, on June 17, alongside the demand for the revocation of the increase in the price of urban transport, the axis was the protest against the violence of the police.

Between June 13 and 17 there was a great wave of sympathy for the demonstrations, and a strong social feeling against the violence of the police and for the right to demonstrate. At this time there was a change in the attitude of the big mass media, which passed from an open hostility to the "Eurosoeunrealism" of the demand to a certain sympathy (although considering, still, that the price increase had been small and so on), and from the attribution of responsibility for the acts of violence to the demonstrators themselves to the attribution of the responsibility to the military police through its exaggerated response. The government of the state decided to change line and to suspend (partially) the repression.

The feeling of solidarity with the previous demonstrations, the rejection of the police violence, the more favourable attitude of the mass media all favoured the explosion of the demonstrations and their nationalization (the press has calculated that were demonstrations in more than 400 cities), and at the same time to the broadening of the slogans. As I already said, the protest against repression became the focus of the motivations; alongside slogans on transport, the most common being "coincidência, sin policia - a no hay violencia" [what a coincidence, without the police there is no violence] (since the demonstration, virtually until its end, was very calm).

At the demonstration of Monday June 17 another important subject was the protest against the exorbitant cost of the soccer World Cup and the Confederations Cup. There were many slogans of the type "não quero uma bola, quero escola", which rhymes in Portuguese. In the same way there were slogans about health and education being more important than soccer. They were also many slogans against homophobia, a subject that has caused many protest mobilizations against the religious fundamentalist right in recent months (there is a great mobilization of public opinion against the draft law that allows homosexuality to be treated as a disease, defended by the religious fundamentalist right).

At the same time, slogans against corruption took on a stronger presence. That corresponds to a popular feeling, of course, but it also corresponded to a line of the right wing press. The country's biggest circulation magazine, the right wing "Veja", had a cover on the weekend of June 15-16 saying "o revolta da juventude - depois do preço da viagem, agora é a hora da corrupção e criminalidade". Other press organs did not go as far as to propose that youth fight against criminality (that is to say, for more police), but also emphasized the question of corruption.

That is: at the same time that the demonstrations have become very broad (already in Monday June 17 there were demonstrations in many capitals of the country and other cities, with definitely much more than 100,000 people in Sao Paulo and more than 100,000 in Rio de Janeiro according to the mass media), and national, they have also begun to show more significant diversity and contradictions.

Are there similarities with the mobilizations of the indignant in other countries?

For sure there are many similarities between the protests in Brazil and the movements of the indignant in other countries. All are movements mainly of youth (although in Brazil there has since June 17 been more of a presence of other age groups), all have used means of convening via Facebook and other media of that type. There is a feeling of indignation in the face of injustice that is a strong component of the motivations of the movement. But, naturally, there are many specificities in Brazil - for example, I do not believe that in any other country the movement of the indignant has faced a government of a party with the history of the PT. It is possible also that in Brazil we count more on a network of non-traditional social and popular organizations of several types than in other countries.

Which social sectors are at the origin of the mobilizations? What are their forms of struggle and organization?

At the start of the movement against the increase of the price of public transport in Sao Paulo it was the Movimento Passe Livre (that is to say, for free public transport). It is a movement that has existed since 2005, and has already had many mobilizations, but never with the amplitude of today. It is a movement that is defined as non-partisan and anti-hierarchical, horizontal but not anti-party. In general, it has had always good relations with the parties more to the left, like the PSOL and the PSTU. In fact, the PSOL and the PSTU supported the mobilizations from June 6, collaborating with the MPL, and also some sectors of the PT have been involved. Organizations of youth close to the PSOL (where young PSOL members are active) have had an important participation. From the beginning anarchist sectors have also participated.

The main immediate challenge for the anti-capitalist left is to contribute to the development of the movement

The social base of the MPL is mainly youth of the intermediate layers (as are the members of the MPL themselves). There is no doubt that is a left movement, and in general more to the left than the PT.

After June 13, many other movements and organizations have been incorporated in the mobilizations and have participated in their convocations. In Sao Paulo, there is the MTST (Movimiento de los Trabajadores Sin Techo - Movement of Workers Without a Roof) and Periferia Activa, both movements that organize inhabitants of the peripheries of the city. Also involved have been sectors of the LGBT movement, women, and youth movements. The governmental left (sectors of the PT and the PC do B) have also begun to participate. The participation of anarchists has been extended. On the other hand, far right groups have begun to participate, to try to change the focus of the movement.

In other cities similar sectors have called demonstrations: groups that fight for free public transport or against price increases (the MPL does not exist throughout the country; in various cities there are similar movements), in collaboration with left parties.

In many cities there are Popular Cup Committees, which have for more than two years organized a critical mobilization against not only the exorbitant cost of the soccer World Cup, but also against the violations of rights of populations removed for work related to the Cup, against the exceptional legislation for the Cup (at FIFA's demand) and so on. In many cities, these Committees have had (and continue to have) an important participation in the calls for demonstrations. In fact, the demonstrations that have been most violently repressed by the police have been those near the Confederation Cup games (at FIFA's demand). Nonetheless, over the last week there have been more people protesting outside the Cup games than within them.

As of Monday June 17, on the other hand, the convening of the demonstrations has been increasingly multiple, thorough Facebook or other means, much beyond the capacities of the above mentioned organizations. Most of the participants in the movement continue to be young people from the intermediate layers (including, obviously, young wage-earners), but it has extended to age groups and social layers especially the poorer layers of inhabitants of the peripheries of the big cities.

What relationship does the present movement have with the other social movements: the landless, the homeless and so on? Is there articulation between this social movement and other sectors?

As I explained in the previous question, there is an important participation of movements of the homeless, of movements of youth, movements of inhabitants of the peripheries, and the Popular Cup Committees. In some cities, the MST has also supported the demonstrations, even though they are demonstrations of the urban population.

On the other hand, there is no relation, or there is no good relation, between the present mobilizations and the organized labour movement. We can say that the participation of the working class as a class is not noticeable, even though the CUT (and also other unions I believe) has begun to support demonstrations formally. I believe that the most important difficulty for this - and this also affects, to a certain extent, the relations between the movement expressed in the demonstrations and the MST - is in the control of the CUT by the federal government and the excessive proximity of the MST with that same government. The tone of the movement is very naturally against of the federal government (in addition to being against the state governments and the municipalities in general).

From Europe it is seen as perplexing that in the country of soccer people are mobilized as the World Cup approaches, demanding less soccer and more investment in other sectors (education, health and so on). Can you explain this?

In fact, also for us, Brazilians, that was one of the reasons for the surprise at the breadth of the demonstrations. But it is not difficult to find the explanation. The Confederations Cup (and the same applies still more to the World Cup) is not done so that the people can participate. The tickets are expensive. In addition, and more important than that, the whole process of organization of the so-called "Eurosoemega-events" (World Cup, Olympic Games, Confederations Cup) is scandalous, and offends the feeling of justice of the people. The cost is very high, the benefit to the companies is very great, the demands of FIFA - a true state of emergency - are absurd. A part of the population suffers through the removals.

Already for more than two years there has been work by popular organizations, grouped in the Popular Cup Committees, to call attention to the absurdity of the policy of "Eurosoemega-events". I believe that, instead of acting as a reducer of the mobilizations, the Confederations Cup has strongly impelled them. The feeling of justice, the indignation against injustice of the people has spoken louder than the taste for soccer.

What has been the response from the government to the demands of the movement? Are there contradictions in the state apparatus?

The government, or rather, the different governments, of different parties, throughout the country, has yielded on the question of the prices of urban transport. On that initial subject, the movement has gained a clear and rapid victory.

In addition, the president of the republic, Dilma, made a speech on Friday June 21 promising "Eurosoeto hear the voice of the streets", saying that "Eurosoeshe will not tolerate disturbances (arruaÃ§as)" (and overall will guarantee the security of the games of the Confederations Cup) while proposing "Eurosoea national pact for public services". That is, she has not defined any change of political direction; she has said that she will do the same thing with more efficiency and more coordination with the governors of states and municipalities. As yet it is too early to say what impact it will have, but, for the moment, it does not seem that there is any change in the situation. The mobilizations continue, and more are predicted for the coming days.

There were many more similarities than differences in the responses of the different governments from different parties, the PT and their allies, and of the right wing opposition. I do not believe that we can, at the moment, speak of contradictions in the state apparatus.

What relationship is there between this movement and the left? is it non-political? Do you think that it is being recuperated by the right?

I have already given some elements that are part of the answer to that question. The movement has a clearly non-partisan tendency (in the sense that there is a strong distrust in relation to the parties), although I would not call it in any way non-political.

The initial tendency of the movement was very clearly to the left: the slogan for free public transport (or the revocation of the price increases) is clearly of the left. Other subjects of the movement, like the criticism of the exorbitant cost of the World Cup, the defence of better health and education, are also of the left, as are the slogans against homophobia, for example.

On the other hand, from the demonstration of Thursday June 13 in Sao Paulo, when it was clear that the movement would experience great growth, the right - including the extreme right - began to intervene in the movement, through the mass media and direct presence in the demonstrations.

On Thursday June 20 in several cities, mainly Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, where there were the biggest demonstrations, the aggressive presence of far right groups, with the collaboration of police provocateurs, gained a partial victory, expelling people who carried flags of parties or movements from the demonstration. In Sao Paulo, that began against the flags of the PT, but later it was extended to flags of other parties or movements. And it went as far as attacks on people who simply dressed in red clothes.

Those aggressions have reflected the spontaneous feeling of distrust towards the parties, which is for two different reasons: the loss of prestige of the institutional parties (including people that support the government but do not have a positive view of the parties who compose it) and what is seen, with some reason, as the opportunism of the left parties, who, by taking huge banners and placing themselves at the front of demonstrations give the impression that a great part of the people who demonstrate support them. In addition, that feeling very was reinforced by the bourgeois mass media, who seek to reinforce the feeling that "Everyone must be united under the Brazilian flag".

I do not believe, however, that the movement is being recuperated by the right, nor that it can be. What exists is a great dispute about directions and slogans. It is very important to indicate, meanwhile, that until now what has been obtained concretely - the revocations of the increases of the prices of urban transport throughout the country - have been victories of the left.

It is interesting to observe that the announcement of that revocation in Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, and several other cities, was done on Wednesday June 19 (other cities already had done it before). The demonstration of June 20 in those cities, that had already been called, was maintained "as a commemoration". The feeling of victory broadened the demonstration (the media have spoken of more than 300,000 people in Rio de Janeiro, for example), but, at the same time, left it without any clear unifying slogan.

A key question is that significant sections of the people have had the experience of mobilizing massively, they have gained victories, and they have liked it. That can be exhausted by fatigue later, but I do not believe that it can be recuperated by the right.

What problems does this movement raise for the PT?

The situation of the PT is very difficult, at least immediately. There is no doubt that it was the party that has lost the most with the mobilizations. Mainly, a good part of its discourse of recent years has been undermined: it cannot continue saying that there is a process of development in Brazil and that the people are satisfied. And one of its central orientations, the policy of the "mega-events", has failed completely. The Confederations Cup, which it thought would be an opportunity to increase its prestige, has resulted in an immense erosion.

It is the first time in its history that the PT has faced big mass mobilizations that are hostile to it. From the beginning of the Lula government - already with the very conservative pension reform (Previdencia) - the PT was used to dealing with strikes and mobilizations opposing its governments. Often it has negotiated, counting on the collaboration of most of the union leadership, other times it has resorted to the repression. But even the biggest mobilization against one of its governments - the mobilization around pension reform - cannot be compared with the bulk of the mobilizations that exist today.

That is causing, obviously, a deep discontent in the PT. Before Thursday June 20, the president of the party, Rui Falcão, made a call to activists of the PT to participate in the demonstrations with its flags. The result was a disaster: it was seen by many of the demonstrators as a provocation, it was one of the things that facilitated the far right groups in expelling activists with party and movement flags.

The predominant tendency in the PT now, and mainly of the sectors that support it from a position more to the left, like the MST in recent years, has been to call for unity with all the left (that is, with the left opposition to the governments of the PT), to stand together against the right. But this is very contradictory with the fact that the governments of the PT do not show any opening, any change of direction. They maintain the same line that has caused (and continues causing) the demonstrations. It is evident that the opposition from the left to the governments of the PT cannot accept an alliance on those bases.

And what problems does the movement raise for the radical left? What are the challenges that face these mobilizations at the moment, so that they do not peter out?

A first question is to reach a good understanding of what has happened. The radical left has been also surprised at the breadth of the mobilizations, and with the complexity of the struggle that then occurs between sectors of left and right in the demonstrations. We are advancing, I believe, in the understanding of the situation.

A second question is the relationship with the PT and the parties that are their satellites, like the PC do B, and the question of what unity of the left to look for. There is a pressure from these sectors in favour of unity of the left. There is then a debate in the different sectors of the radical left, but I believe that the tendency is very clear, and correct: we can make no alliance with sectors that defend (although it is a supposedly critical defence) of the governments of the PT.

The unity of the left that we must look for is with the sectors that are located in opposition to the governments of the PT (and, obviously, in opposition to the governments of the right opposition to the federal government). That includes anarchists, non-party and movementist sectors, like the MPL of Sao Paulo.

In that framework, a trap that should be avoided is the debate on party flags. By all means parties have the right to have and to carry flags - but it is necessary to then find the best way to combine the defence of the legitimacy of the participation of party activists in the mobilizations, without giving the impression (and in many cases it is hardly an impression) of wanting to appear as the leadership of the movement and without dishonestly giving the idea that all the demonstrators support the party. There are other party symbols that are much more acceptable, like, for example, party t-shirts.

The central dispute is not about the brand of the parties, but the political direction of the movement, its demands and slogans. With that we pass to another challenge, that is to find (along with all the sectors that impel the movement) the best demands and slogans to advance now. Here, there are some more or less clear ideas. The question of urban transport - to advance towards free transport or, perhaps, free transport for young people or something in this line, the question of the quality of that transport - continues as an important axis.

This week, two other questions tend to have priority: the protests against the Confederations Cup (and the expense in general of the mega-events), and the fight against the draft law that allows treating homosexuality as a disease, defended by the religious fundamentalist right. Already there was a big demonstration in Sao Paulo strictly on that subject (Friday June 21), with more than 10,000 people, and that is a subject that has had great presence on many of the broadest manifestations. The subject is in debate in the House of Representatives, and many deputies already begin to show opposition. A short term victory seems very probable.

Finally, the hardest challenge is the dispute with the right (especially in the big mass media) and with the groups of extreme right. A way to handle that dispute is exactly to call demonstrations with clear demands and slogans, in which the demonstrators will have an inclination naturally to the left, and the right and far right groups will - if they participate - be isolated.

The unity of the non-governmental left is another way to face the right.

And, in addition, it will be necessary to take care of more of the organizational aspects, like the protection of the demonstrators against provocations.

How would you define the political situation in Brazil today?

There are signals that the policy that the PT in power has followed - to give something for those at the bottom, on condition of not entering any clash with the dominant classes - is exhausting itself. The PT has been, without doubt, the party that has been most affected by the demonstrations, as well as the other parties either allied to the PT (like the PMDB, of the governor of Rio de Janeiro, Sergio Cabral, very much attacked by the demonstrators) or opposing it (like the PSDB, of the governor of Sao Paulo), which have also been affected.

I do not believe that there is any possibility of a coup from the right, as some sectors of the PT have raised. The right has no reason to mount a coup: the government of the PT cannot be the government of its dreams, but it serves it well. In this crisis, the parties of the right have behaved in a very similar way to the PT. What interests the right is to take advantage of the crisis to erode the PT (talking a lot "through the mass media - of corruption, trying to make it seem that the problem of corruption is more of a federal than a state level question) and to be better placed for the next elections.

It is not clear where the movement will go, nor to what extent it will represent a change in the correlation of forces. We have indications that the movement has the strength to go forward, can win more victories, but it does not seem probable that it will lead to a more fundamental change by itself. A key question is self-limitation: although the loss of legitimacy of the political system is strong, the movement does not pose the objective of changing the political regime or the government, and we are far from "se vayan todos".

It seems sure, on the other hand, that some change in the correlation of forces will result from the mobilizations. The PT and their satellites have lost a lot, the right opposition has also lost, although less. The organizations, the social movement close to the PT and their allies, like the CUT, which are already highly bureaucratized, are probably going to lose something. More independent organizations, like the different organizations which have impelled the mobilizations, will probably be strengthened.

Passing to the non-governmental political parties (which are much weaker than the PT or the right opposition parties), we can evaluate, until now, that a party that is going to be strengthened is the Rede Sustentabilidade [Sustainability Network] led by Marina Silva, a party still in the process of obtaining registration. It is a party that, already from its name, tries to create the impression that it is not a party. It has a "clean" image and it is not in any government.

The PSOL, probably, has also already benefitted from the movement, and could benefit more, although it appears to many of the demonstrators as somehow similar to the PT, since it is a left party, and the PT is still seen by the masses as the major representative of the left, and the feeling of distrust of the parties in general is strong. The PSOL is the party that is more in tune with the demands that have given origin to the movement. In addition, their militants (including its parliamentarians) have participated from the beginning in the mobilizations - especially their younger militants. It is sure that the youth organizations close to the PSOL already have more authority, and they are going to go stronger. In any case, many things will be decided in the struggles of the coming days and weeks.

Is there a credible alternative to the left of the PT? What are the main challenges confronting an anti-capitalist left?

At the moment, at the national level, there is no credible alternative to the left of the PT. We are still in the initial phases of the reconstruction of the Brazilian anti-capitalist left, after the blow that it has suffered with the adhesion of the PT to bourgeois institutionalism. The PSOL, the main political alternative to the left of the PT, is still very weak, and has, in addition, many internal contradictions. It can be a credible alternative in some cities, as in the elections of October 2012, but not at the national level.

The main immediate challenge that the anti-capitalist left has then is to contribute to the development of the movement, in the sense already discussed above. If it can do this, it will also advance in the process of its reconstruction "and build itself as a credible alternative to the left of the PT.

23 June 2013

What do you think of the proposals by the Brazilian president to call a referendum and to devote 100% of oil profits to health and education?

The first proposal was the calling of a popular plebiscite authorizing the operation of a specific constituent process for political reform. It was initially presented as a plebiscite to decide on a constituent assembly exclusively to carry out political reform; the following day, the idea of a constituent assembly was rejected, and replaced by the idea of a plebiscite with questions on political reform.

This proposal, obviously, is an attempt to respond to the clear loss of legitimacy of the political system, which is clear from the demonstrations. In the first version, of a constituent assembly, it could be an opportunity for effective change (which would depend, among other questions, on the rules for the election of the constituents). In the second version, it is much worse. The people would respond to some questions, after an electoral campaign where the big mass media would have much influence - as happens in general in bourgeois elections - and the very unsatisfactory present Congress would give the final form to the political reform. The probability that there is a significant improvement is small; everything is going to depend on the continuity of the popular mobilization to put pressure on the Congress, in the first place so that the questions posed in the plebiscite are not those that the present Congress would wish to propose.

The second proposal mentioned, of the several proposals given by Dilma on Monday, was that of devoting 100% of oil royalties of and 50% of the oil resources of the pre-salt layer that would be received by the various levels of government (federal, state and municipal) to education. That proposal was already changed the following day by the Chamber of Deputies, which approved a proposal of 75% of the oil royalties for education and 25% for health. The project will have to be discussed in the Senate.

It is not known what will be the final result, but it is necessary to point out that this proposal, in whatever version, very is limited and has very bad aspects. The most significant oil royalties are expected to come from oil from the pre-salt layer, which has not yet begun to be exploited. These resources will be very limited for the next few years and will add little to the present resources. The proposal by sectors of the left linked to the fight for education is that of 10% of GDP to go to public education (now) - already a viable proposal, although it would require a substantial change in the budget - for example, with the reduction of the cost of the public debt, through an audit of the latter.

On the other hand, the position of the eco-socialist movement is opposed to the exploitation of oil from the pre-salt layer, because of the great environmental problems involved. In addition, in the predicted model of operation most of the oil profits would go to private companies. In conclusion, the slogan "100% of the pre-salt layer oil royalties for education", very popular among sectors of the left that support the government, is bad in many senses.

Since Monday June 24, the different levels of government, the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate are having a bullfight to see who can announce more good things, which can be presented as a response to the "voice of the streets". What has been announced - or decided, in some cases - is the reduction of the price of public transport (very varied according to the several levels of government responsible, in the different states and cities), including several announcements of "free passes" for students. Another very positive thing is the expected withdrawal in the next few days of the draft law that allows the treatment of homosexuality as a disease - the so-called "gay cure". We need more time to be able to make a clearer evaluation of what has been won - because the mobilizations continue, on a smaller scale, but more numerous and diversified than the previous week.

What has happened in the past few days? Anything new?

In addition to the continuity of the mobilizations, a very rich process of extension of the political discussion is underway, of meetings of different sectors (youth, inhabitants of the peripheries, movements for public transport, movements for education and so on) by far more people than before, to discuss what to do and what to demand in particular. The unions, not very active until now, have announced (with even the more right wing federations participating) a general strike and a day of protests for July 11, with a very progressive basis. Most of the social movements, even those nearest to the government, have supported this call by the unions and present their own demands - also very progressive. Ex-president Lula has met with some social sectors close to him and says that it is time "to go for the streets" to face the right and to push the government towards the left. Evidently, that position of Lula has some fairly comedic elements to it, but it is an expressive sign of what is happening in the country.

The threat from the right, which seemed significant at the end of last week, is much more limited. Some mobilizations with clearly rightist orientations that have been tried were clearly a total defeat.

We do not know if all the popular and union mobilizations announced will really happen, nor their strength. After the last ten years, it is difficult to think that the very bureaucratized CUT will really flex its muscles, not to speak the more rightwing federations. The same can be said of an organization like the highly bureaucratized UNE (National Union of Students), one of the organizations which has met with Lula. The sectors of the socialist left in the different movements, which are being strengthened, for sure, with the present process, are still very much in the minority.

But something we can say with great certainty is that the political participation of the people has taken a qualitative leap; let's hope that its consciousness does the same. Brazil is no longer the same, that's for sure.

27 June 2013