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Brazil

Fortaleza: the campaign that relied on the militants

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Elected as mayor of Fortaleza, a city of almost two million inhabitants, capital of the state of Ceara (in the North-East of Brazil), Luizianne Lins, militant of the Socialist Democracy (DS) tendency of the Workers' Party (PT), chosen by the local militants of the PT as candidate for the post. In the first round she had to face Inacio Aruda, candidate of the Communist Party of Brazil (PCdoB) who had the support of the majority of the national leadership of the PT. The PT in Fortaleza even had to go to court to stop its opponent saying in his TV spots that Lula supported him.

Luizianne was one of the rare PT candidates to receive the active support of militants who had left the party after the expulsion of Senator Heloisa Helena and the MPs Baba, Joao Fontes and Luciana Genro, to found the party of Socialism and Freedom (PSoL). Predicted to lose by the opinion polls, Luizianne created a sensation by coming second in the first round with 22.3 per cent of the votes. In the second round she won with 56.2 per cent of the votes against Moroni Torgan, the candidate of the Party of the Liberal Front, and was described by the press as "the new star of the Brazilian Left". We publish here the interview she gave to the monthly Democracia Socialista (n° 8, November-December 2004).

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

Democracia Socialista: *Can you say a few words about your campaign...*

Luizianne Lins: The success in the first round was decisive - the people of Fortaleza got involved in the campaign. We chose to make an alliance with the Brazilian Socialist party (PSB) which chose the candidate for deputy mayor.

The motor force of the campaign was the people of Fortaleza, because the middle classes were divided between our candidature and the PCdoB. Since in the first round we had received neither resources nor help from the party nationally, we staked everything on a militant campaign. The militants were just as active when the polls were giving us 3 per cent as when we had a chance of winning after the result of the first round.

From the point of view of electoral marketing we chose to talk about love. So I was asked if talking about love wasn't depoliticising the debate: I replied that there couldn't be a feeling that was stronger, more revolutionary and with more power to transform, than love. Our slogan was "For love of Fortaleza".

For the second round we received the support of seven parties (PHS, PV, PPS, PRP, PCdoB, PCB and PDT) [1] but we refused the support of the others. We had said in advance that we didn't want the support of the PMDB, the PSDB and the PL. But we didn't refuse the support of certain people belonging to those parties.

It was a very hard campaign, our opponents didn't hesitate to resort to homophobia, accusing us of defending the rights of homosexuals. There were also a lot of pamphlets of doubtful origin...

DS: *And that the fact that you are a woman? Was that also used by your opponents?*

LL: Always. They insisted on the fact that I was the only woman PT candidate for mayor of a state capital. It's not a coincidence. The participation of women in various spheres of social activity is difficult, politics is just one more. But after all, the other ten candidates were men and it's me, the only woman, who was elected...

DS: *What other aspects contributed to your victory?*

LL: The fact that the PT was reunified after the first round was important. President Lula took the initiative of according me an audience to demonstrate that as a militant he wanted me to win. It was a gesture of great political grandeur that other leaders didn't show. I think it was an important lesson for the PT and for the country. A lesson that you have to trust the people and the society when you take decisions at the top.

Before the first round we sold shirts because we didn't have any money. For the second round campaign we received material from the PT, but we chose not to organise mega-shows. First of all, because before the first round, all the shows were organised for the candidate of the PCdoB, secondly because we thought that it had a depoliticising effect.

The only thing we had during the campaign was the orchestra of the Legiao Urbana. To music by Monte Castelo they sang: "In spite of myself I spoke the language of the angels/ In spite of myself I spoke the language of men/Without love I would be nothing/I sing a song of love that is transforming, revolutionary and socialist".

DS: *What other lessons can the PT learn from this process?*

LL: That you have to place your faith in militancy, do politics differently from the bourgeoisie. Our success is a clear indication in that direction. We didn't have paid activists, everything was done by people who were fighting for their ideals, the way the PT always did it before.

DS: *Do you counter-pose that to the excessive importance given to marketing in the PT's campaigns?*

LL: If you look at it objectively, marketing and advertising have never won an election. Where they were used the most, the elections weren't won. Society is capable of being sufficiently discerning to not give in to political marketing. It can only be a back-up, the instrument for an idea for a project. Politics is not aesthetics. This election was important for people who have other preoccupations than just an interest in marketing.

DS: *You're going to govern the city, what will be the mechanisms of developing participatory democracy?*

LL: We are planning to build in all the neighbourhoods popular organisations that won't be institutionalised Thematic councils. The goal is a popular organisation that will enable everyone to discuss with the city hall and with the mayoress.

The participatory budget will be a principle for the administration. But the idea that we have is to broaden participatory democracy beyond the single issue of the budget. We have to radicalise democracy, that's exactly what is missing from the PT at national level.

Popular participation will be something absolutely new for Fortaleza. For the moment there exists an apparatus of the city hall with some mechanisms of participatory democracy... There's nothing new there, and - although I don't like the word - nothing different. It's just a way of "doing politics".

DS: *What will your priorities be?*

LL: We are going to stake a lot on children and young people. Nearly 40 per cent of the population of Fortaleza is under 18. Those sectors will be our priority. In addition, Fortaleza suffers from a terrible scourge, which I denounced

as a municipal councillor and MP - sexual tourism. Those are questions that the society will have to discuss.

We have serious problems with education. Basic education is reasonably accessible to everyone, but that doesn't mean that the pupils stay in school. So the big challenge is to improve municipal education.

In Fortaleza the system of family health care only reaches 15.4 per cent of the population. That's absurd when we are over-supplied with health centres and hospitals. The universalisation of the family health care programme, including dental care, is a priority.

The question of housing is also very important. We have 92 sectors that are dangerous and 75,000 people live there. All the year round these people die because of the rains (which cause mudslides).

DS: *What relations do you plan to have with the municipal council (the legislative organ) and how do you see the composition of the executive?*

LL: We are fighting to put together a majority on the Municipal council without using the same methods as the Right - buying votes, trading votes for posts, etc. I know that it's not going to be easy.

To do it we have to establish a process in which the society participates. That forces these institutions to have a different kind of relationship with the city hall. I was a municipal councillor and I know how important these representatives are for the people. They are a sounding board for society. And I don't want to spend four years managing a conflict with the Council.

DS: *How many councillors did the coalition get elected?*

LL: Three for the PT and one for the PSB. On top of that the left is weak - there are at most 10 left municipal councillors out of a total of 41. So we'll have to grit our teeth, without abandoning our principles. For the composition of the executive we have decided to put together a transitional team, taking account of the opinions of the parties. But we have defined criteria: technical ability, party-political commitment and being available on a full-time basis. The PT and the PSB have given 13 names, the others will come from the parties that supported us.

At the same time we are setting up a party-political council and we are moving towards a political management council, which will involve the parties but also sectors of the society. All the social forces involved in the struggle, even the humblest, will be represented in the running of the city. A council like that existed alongside me during my first term as a municipal councillor and it was always very important. It can't only be the parties that define the orientations for running the city.

[1] The PHS (Humanist Solidarity Party) is a small Social Christian party. The PRP (Progressive Republican Party) is a small centre-left party. The PCB (Brazilian Communist Party) is a small left socialist party which kept the historic name of the party when a big majority of the ex-PCB formed the PPS.