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Brazil

Interview with Heloisa Helena

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"To fill the bellies of the bankers it is necessary to empty the plates of Brazilians"

We publish here an interview with Brazilian socialist senator Heloisa Helena, recently expelled from the ruling Workers' Party (PT). The interview was published in "Jornal do Brasil", February 8, 2004. Heloisa has recently been involved in establishing a coordination for the creation of a new left party.

How is the new party of the left doing?

[<https://www.internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/35721.jpg>]

First there was a working meeting of some left groups to define common points, like internal democracy. Now, there will be plenaries of preparation for the forum of debates that will begin in March and will go on until June. There are many obstacles in the electoral legislation: for that reason I say that we are making a passage in the desert. We want to hold our first congress in the first week of June and, from that, we will have to get 500,000 signatures to obtain definitive registration. This law is recent and none of the existing parties have had to comply with it. It is a herculean task, but already I am used to the heat of the "hinterland" of Alagoas. [1]

What stage will be dealt with in tomorrow's meeting, in Rio?

It will be the first plenary in Rio de Janeiro, in the University. A new party is not born by decree, nor by the will of a political personality. We are clear that the necessity exists to build an alternative party on the left that is not a prisoner of the impure jails of power.

What is the philosophy of the new party?

We want to help in the construction of alternatives, to be a rallying point for the socialist and democratic left. We will defend the historical flags of the working-class. We will respect the right of tendencies. We are open to all, except neoliberals, nazis, racists, political delinquents. We could be eating at the banquets of the powerful in the Palace of the Planalto¹, but we prefer to build this option.

Is it possible to govern without making an agreement with the IMF?

I have no doubt of that. I defend the programme of the party, that the relationship of Brazil to the international community is not one of submission to foreign capital, represented by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and other institutions of multilateral financing. The IMF is not a philanthropic organization, sponsoring the "philanthropy" of the international bankers. It is no more than an annex of the US Treasury. Perhaps the Brazilian government itself, having already sponsored this whole dirty game with the IMF, will not renew the agreement in the coming year. There is nothing revolutionary in such an attitude. The Brazilian constitution says that national sovereignty is the unavoidable basis for economic policy.

Is it possible to suspend the payment of the foreign debt?

Most of us defend an audit of the debt. Throughout the recent history of the country, parties of the left and many significant militants of the social movements went to the public with plebiscites and petitions, proposing, at the same

time, an audit of and the non-payment of the debt. I do not understand, but for cynicism, dissimulation and political shamelessness, how these people think the opposite today. To be against the audit of the debt and to defend its payment is to be reactionary, conservative. Celso Furtado [2] has proposed to Lula that he prepare the country for the moratorium. We need to finish with this terrorism promoting fear. This alone serves to legitimize this failed, bankrupt model. This formula is not correct anywhere in the world. This model is correct for a minority of parasites that illegitimately appropriates the efforts of the majority of people.

The new party will have to overcome the [electoral] threshold clause, that will prevail in the 2006 elections. We know of the difficulties. We are surviving. We have to go through life swallowing our fears, but we learn to resist. After what happened to me in the state of Alagoas in order to build the PT, risking my life, being humiliated, being massacred, I can fear nothing. The threshold clause is a very little thing compared with the challenges that we have already faced.

Was it possible to draw anything positive from the process of expulsion from the PT?

I sensed how the democratic sentiment has taken root in the soul of the Brazilian people, from the simplest people to the most sophisticated. The people who did not agree with my world view said that I had the right to defend what I believed. That was a balm for the wounds opened in my soul and my heart.

[<https://www.internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/35722.jpg>]

"Heard the one about the leftie who got in bed with the IMF?" - Nestor Kirchner (Argentina), Lula and Hugo Chavez

The public policies, including the social ones, reflect the economic option of the government, who resolved to devote 18% of the contribution intended for health to increase the budget surplus. There is no magic involved here. The economic policy is what determines the failure of Hunger Zero, of the agrarian reform, of education, of health. In order to fill the belly of the bankers it is necessary to empty the plates of the Brazilians.

How do you see the municipal elections?

The PT will experience significant growth, since there has been a general relaxing in the policy of alliances, allowing it to ally with the PT, the PMDB of Quercia and Jader, the PL and the PP of Maluf (well known for corruption). 2003 was a year of good services rendered to foreign capital. I believe that money will not be lacking for the campaign.

Do you feel frustrated to be forced to give up the dream of being mayor of Maceio? [3]

It was an extremely painful personal experience. I had already been forced to withdraw my candidacy for the post of state governor. [4] I was preparing to run for the municipality and they removed me from the official list. [5] They took the symbol, prevented my candidacy, but they did not take away what I believe I have that is better, namely my libertarian soul.

Do you have something against the mayor of Maceió, Kátia Born?

I do not have anything personal against anybody, no. Nor against Sarney, [6] who has dealt with me in a delicate and respectful way. I have political differences.

What is your relationship to religion?

I am ecumenical by nature. I have friends in diverse religions. I respect all the tribes. I am Catholic. I always go to

church. I have many friends in the interior who are priests. Over the last week I went to four masses in a single city, helping in the celebration. I rediscovered my faith some years ago, through pain, and am firmly resolved. My religious experience is with the comrade in the skies who has already given me much proof of love during the difficult times that I have had in life.

Do you consider yourself a celebrity?

That does not say anything, to be a celebrity. I feel happy with the affection and the solidarity of the people. That makes me happy.

Did you experience hunger during the childhood?

(long pause) For sure I didn't need to rummage in rubbish dumps, but I experienced great difficulties. All of which made me better. All the difficulties that I went through in childhood, even if marked by poverty or humiliation, are insignificant compared to what happens to people today. It hurts to see a girl in the street selling her body for a plate of food, or a child who, instead of being like my children, able to choose what to eat or have a computer in their room, is destined for marginality. I am a survivor.

[1] Brazil's presidential palace.

[2] Celso Furtado is a well known Brazilian economist of the "developmentalist" school.

[3] Maceio is the capital of the state of Alagoas.

[4] Heloisa Helena had intended to run as PT candidate for governor of the state of Alagoas but withdrew after the national leadership of the PT had made a deal with the Liberal Party that would have imposed a notoriously corrupt candidate as vice-governor.

[5] To run as a candidate for mayor it is necessary to be on a party list, and Heloisa Helena could not do so after being expelled from the PT.

[6] The reference is to the PT government's chief "enforcer" in Congress.