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Brazil

Linking experience with struggle

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Olivio Dutra, Heloisa Helena and Geraldo Candido [\[1\]](#) introduce comrade Raoul Pont as candidate for the National Presidency of the PT:

Raul Pont was born in Uruguaiana, Rio Grande do Sul, in 1944. A founder member of the PT, he is a member of the National and State Directory of the party.

A student leader in the 1960s, he chaired the DCE of the UFRS [\[2\]](#) in 1968. He was a trade union militant and university professor in the 1970s and 1980s and a founder of the journal Em Tempo at the end of the 1970s. He was Secretary General and President of the PT in Rio Grande do Sul and a member of the National Executive and Treasurer of the Party.

He was a candidate to the Senate during the first election contested by the Party, in 1982 and the first PT candidate for mayor of Porto Alegre, in 1985.

In 1986 he was elected as state deputy, gaining the highest vote of any PT candidate in Rio Grande do Sul. He led the group of state deputies in 1987 and 1988. In 1990 he was elected federal deputy; in 1992, he was elected deputy mayor of Porto Alegre. In 1996, he was elected mayor of Porto Alegre, in the first round, with 55% of the vote.

From the foundation of the PT, Raul has been recognized by all for his concern for democracy within the party. He was in the forefront of the defence of tendency rights, of proportional representation on the leadership bodies and a minimum quota of 30% of women in the leadership. From the beginning of the experience of the local administrations in Porto Alegre, he developed a new central concern: linking the experiences of left government with the struggle for socialism.

These concerns - presented below in the form of theses- are centrally relevant to the new period of struggles and the renewed chance we have of winning power at national and federal level.

(NOTE: in the PT's presidential elections Raul Pont came second with 17.5% of the vote and scored 47% of the vote in his home state of Rio Grande do Sul).

Theses

1. Electoral victories in dozens of cities, several capitals and the conquest of state governments, as in Rio Grande do Sul, prove the viability and necessity of a political front linking the popular democratic, feminist, antiracist, ecologist and socialist camp, establishing the social base underlying the strategy of a programme of transition to socialism. If it is possible in the municipalities and the states, it is possible also in the entire country starting from a program which is identified with the interests of the majority of the population.

2. Our governments can provide an experience of participatory democracy which challenges the inevitable and immutable character of the traditional representative system. Direct democracy and popular sovereignty go beyond the concept of traditional citizenship and make possible a process of participation and an awakening of the consciousness of the population, posing in new forms the historical debate on the relationship of society to the state.

3. The question of democracy, increasingly obviously in contradiction with the neo-liberal capitalist state (provisional measures, authoritative centralism, dictatorship of capital in the workplaces and so on) constitute a key and strategic element in a project of transition to socialism. With the national question, it is one of the most significant programmatic axes for socialists, because of its mobilizing potential and because it is essential to the strategic project which we defend. The experiences of left governments are the base on which we will defend, stimulate and practice popular participation by defending its autonomy and its self-organization. There is no socialist project without self-organization of the workers and producers, and the autonomy of these experiences with respect to the current representative system is a necessity for the political education of the majority of the population.

4. Our governments are significant for the construction of political hegemony in society. Participatory democracy enables us to face the power of the media and the economic regime, without underestimating them and believing that popular participation is enough to defeat them. It is clear that the question of ownership, the institutions of the capitalist State or the concessions to national telecommunications networks are not resolved at the level of a municipality. But a participatory democracy can constitute a network of associative organizations of services, culture, leisure, sport, or in the area of production and trade with the micro and small entrepreneurs involving thousands of citizens. It constitutes a social vanguard... This dynamic will be all the more vigorous when its dimension extends to the national level.

5. The process of social transformation is much fuller and complex than the conquest of left governments. However, our governments cannot be seen as being separated from this more general fight to go beyond capitalism, or our experience will simply be that of management of a state in crisis, leading to serious political and ideological defeats. The transformation for which we fight requires, above all, an intense popular self organization and the growth of the leading political role of the working class and its allies in the fight for the transcendence of exploitation and alienation, the destruction of the environment and oppressions of gender, race, national cultural and religious character. Our governments, thanks to participatory democracy and the realization of their program, can instigate and contribute strongly to the advancement of these historic conditions in the struggle for socialism.

6. Our experiences have already acquired a great international dimension and it is one of the central aspects that has to be developed by the governments and by the PT. To be aware of this task is fundamental as we prepare ourselves to contest and win the elections for the presidency of the Republic and the governments of the states. A development comprising national sovereignty and democracy, justice, distribution of wealth, agrarian reform, presupposes a confrontation with the neo-liberal forces inside the country but also with the imperialist centres and their instruments of domination. To break the encirclement and the asphyxiation that they impose on us, which have already cost so dear to so many experiences in Latin America and in the world, it is necessary to develop solid internationalist links with other left experiences and the social movements. Evidence of this potential is the World Social Forum which will have its second meeting in Porto Alegre in 2002; the repercussions beyond Brazil of the experience of the Participatory Budget; the construction of significant initiatives of international mobilization, like the Women's March, the Plebiscite on the Foreign Debt and those which are developing against the FTAA (Free Trade Area of the Americas).

7. Our Workers' Party must rise up to the level of these challenges and others. Our institutional victories only have meaning if they are integrated with a socialist project. And there is no socialist project without socialist parties. The PT as the main socialist party in Brazil must overcome organizational and programmatic backwardness in relation to the conquests already won and those which can be won soon. In addition that cannot be done without overcoming practices, conduct and conceptions, which do not reflect our best qualities as a democratic, militant and socialist party.

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[1] The candidate for the presidency of the PT workers must be nominated by individuals. Thus the candidacy of Raul Pont is introduced by three known leaders of the PT (of which only Heloisa Helena is a member of the Socialist Democracy current of the PT): Olivio Dutra (governor of the state of Rio Grand do Sul), Heloisa Helena (senator), Geraldo Candido (PT senator).

[2] The Diretorio Central dos Estudantes (DCE) is a student organization, in this case of the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (UFRS).