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Brazil

Reactions to Lula's conviction

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On January 24, the Regional Court of Brazil's Fourth Region confirmed the conviction of former President Lula for corruption, in a case concerning the alleged ownership of an apartment in Guarujá (São Paulo). Lula became ineligible from running for political office under a law promulgated by his own government. And he can now be arrested. There are several other lawsuits against Lula, which are still ongoing. There is no doubt that there was corruption in his government (as in all other Brazilian governments in recent decades). And there is no doubt that Lula was involved, and there must be some evidence against him.

A political condemnation

But in the case recently tried, the evidence is extremely doubtful. His conviction was certainly motivated by the political interests of the majority of the Brazilian right. General elections are scheduled for October and, with regard to the presidency of the Republic, all polls place Lula far ahead of the other candidates, both in the first and second rounds. For this reason, he rightly says (and not only to the left) that this conviction is a continuation of the parliamentary coup d'état that drove Dilma Rousseff out of power. After the judgment, the PT reaffirmed Lula's candidacy. although he is not eligible.

Appeals will be filed against the conviction. In addition, the law allows the registration of his candidacy (in August), and only afterwards can it be challenged. And as the PT can appeal the judgement, it is even possible that Lula could be elected, and his then taking office will be rejected. The recent polls conducted have shown that, so far, the confirmation of the conviction did not reduce voting intentions for Lula. In addition, they show that a candidate supported by him would have fewer votes than him but would go to the second round. It is possible for the PT to maintain Lula's candidacy and replace it only a few weeks before the election.

A divided left

In this confused scenario, the Brazilian left has divided in recent weeks into at least four positions. If we consider the PT and its allies to be part of the left, it can be said that the latter has largely protested against Lula's conviction, defended his right to be a candidate, and asserted that it supported (or could support) his candidacy. These sectors do not necessarily believe in Lula's "innocence" but are just like that part of the population that, according to the investigations, believes him guilty but intends to vote for him.

A second part of the left, critical of the PT governments (class collaboration, defence of bourgeois interests and popular demobilization), however participated in mobilizations in defence of Lula trying as much as possible to stand out from "Lulism". This sector is formed by a minority part of the Partido Socialismo e Liberdade (PSOL), by a very minority part of the trade union movement and by a minority part of the popular movements and intends to present a candidate for the presidency.

Continuing debates

These two sectors of the left have tried to organize large-scale demonstrations against Lula's condemnation. They were significant (thousands, even tens of thousands of participants), but smaller than expected. Many people intend to vote for Lula, but do not mobilize for his defence.

A third sector of the left, constituted by the majority of PSOL militants, did not participate in the demonstrations, understanding that they would be conceived as part of Lula's campaign. This sector, while denouncing the political nature of the judgments that have already condemned him and defending the right of Lula to run as a candidate, puts forward its criticisms of the PT governments.

Finally, a fourth sector of the left, while having a critical position on the judgments that have condemned Lula, argues that he should be sentenced and imprisoned and, therefore, does not defend his right to be a candidate. This position is shared by a small minority of PSOL activists, by the PSTU (Partido Socialista dos Trabalhadores Unificado, a small "Morenist" party) and the majority of the most left-wing trade union centre in Brazil, the CSP-Conlutas (whose leadership is linked to the PSTU).

In the weeks and months to come, these debates will continue.