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Brazil

The Consolidation of the new PT

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The Workers Party (PT) suffered a defeat in the municipal elections of October 2004. Once the figures for the second round and the definitive results were in, the conclusion was unavoidable: the party suffered significant losses in the big cities, a lesser setback in the medium-sized towns and made progress in the small towns.

Furthermore, the losses were particularly important in the Centre-South, the most developed region of the country. At the same time these elections established a new party profile for the PT. In addition, the Party of Brazilian Social Democracy (PSDB), which obtained a few less votes than the PT in the first round, emerged victorious from these elections inasmuch as it won cities that have strategic importance for any national scenario, starting with Sao Paulo.

THE FACTS

In the first round the PT won 16.3 million votes for its candidates for mayor, compared with 11.9 million in the first round in 2000. It can therefore claim the status of the leading party in Brazil, slightly ahead of the PSDB, which won 15.7 millions, followed by the PMDB with 14.2 millions, the PFL with 11.2 millions, the PP with 6.1 millions, the PDT with 5.5 millions, the PTB with 5.2 millions, the PL with 5 millions, the PPS with 4.9 millions, the PSB with 4.4 millions, the PV with 1.3 million and the PCdoB with 800,000 votes. [\[1\]](#)

In the first round the party increased its number of mayors from 187 to 411. But 221 of them were elected in towns with less than 10,000 inhabitants. The second round confirmed this result. Among the 11 biggest cities in the country the PT was in the lead in Sao Paulo, Belo Horizonte, Recife, Porto Alegre, Belm and Goiania.

Today it governs only Belo Horizonte, Recife and Fortaleza. Among the 85 other capitals and cities of more than 150,000 electors, the number governed by the PT has gone down less, from 22 to 20, but we should note the loss of important municipalities and regional poles in the Centre-South, (such as Campinas, Ribeirao Preto, Piracicaba, Maua, and Franco in the state of Sao Paulo; Caixas do Sul and Pelotas in the state of Rio Grande do Sul; Maringa and Ponta Grossa in the state of Parana; Blumenau and Chapeco in the state of Santa Catarina) which have been replaced by a varied spectrum of towns conquered across the country such as Rio Branco, Palmas and Vitoria. The only new gains of the same importance as the cities that were lost are Osasco in the state of Sao Paulo and Nova Iguau in the state of Rio de Janeiro.

THEIR INTERPRETATION

The leaders of the PT have claimed victory insofar as the party had a bigger and more widely spread vote than in 2000. But to take account of the political weight of the big cities and the regional poles of the Centre-South, we have to look at the headline (even if its a bit exaggerated) of the Folha de Sao Paulo of November 1st: The PT thrown out of the country's big (cities). This phrase refers to the experience of other parties that led the federal government, first of all the former ARENA, the party of the military dictatorship, then the PMDB, which lost the political weight they had.

How can we explain these results? One interpretation within the PT attributes them to local problems. This explanation can work in certain cases and its worth discussing, but the generalised defeat in the states where the party had its most loyal electorate and among the citizens of some of the most politicised and best-informed regions of the country clearly indicates that more general factors were at work.

Among those that seem to have weighed the most heavily, we have to stress the negative judgment that a part of the former militant social base of the PT - both among workers and among the most politicised sectors of the middle classes - made of the governmental measures (the reform of pensions, the minimum wage, the bank workers strike). This combined with their frustration caused by their party's conduct over the course of the last two years, which has led to a weakening of their identification with the PT.

On top of that, there has been a qualitative change in the dominant political regime within the party, with a consolidation of the new PT established by the election of Lula. That shocks the militant sectors of the PTs base and it is significant that among the PT MPs who supported the reforms, only Lindberg was victorious in these elections.

Although the election was not in general centred on national issues, the profile of the PTs political intervention was determined by the positions of the federal government, the defence of which marked the party's municipal campaigns. The traditional heterogeneity of the PT was substantially reduced and only in a few places did it present an anti-liberal profile - it was Fortaleza that was the main exception. Fundamentally, the camp of the left within society was occupied by sectors of this neutralised PT and by the growth of the PDT, the PSB and the PCdoB, whose line was also moderate.

ALLIANCES AND CHANGES IN THE PTS SOCIAL BASE

The very broad spectrum of alliances defined by the PT, which included parties like the PTB, the PMDB and the PL, seems also to have had a big electoral impact. It caused the loss of many PT municipal council seats, in particular in the main cities. Furthermore, it generalised within the PT a new norm of electoral campaigning, conducted in a depoliticised fashion by specialists in political marketing and based on budgets generally involving relations with business groups.

In this way, while the party was being dislocated among the most organised sectors of the working class, it was reinforcing its commitment towards businessmen, rural landowners, holders of public service concessions and other capitalist sectors, who have their place in the bourgeois parties, but who up to now have shone by their near-absence in the PT. The professionalisation of the campaigns, which was already widespread in the state of Sao Paulo, is now becoming the norm. The result is the disappearance of militant activity and red flags.

TRANSFORMATIONS IN THE PARTYS CULTURE

The growth of the PT in the small towns was expected. Its a consequence of winning control of the federal government and using its machine, either to reinforce the party or to draw in traditional politicians, attracting them by the reinforcement of their clientele thanks to social programmes (such as the Family Credit). But it was amplified in these elections, both by the many alliances with the conservative parties (such as the PTB, the PP and even the PFL [2] - a process particularly visible in the campaign conducted in the state of Rio de Janeiro). Thus these elections lost the character of a free and creative political intervention with the pedagogic aim of raising the level of consciousness of the electors.

The analysis of the groups of PT municipal councillors elected in the principal big cities reveals the new profile of the party and the practices that were dominant. In Sao Paulo the number of councillors went down from eighteen to thirteen, of whom twelve had been strongly backed by City Hall (the PTB, allied with the PT, got seven councillors, whereas in the preceding elections it had only had three). Of the six PT municipal councillors who had demonstrated an attitude of independence towards Marta Suplicy, only one was elected.

In Rio de Janeiro, the PT group went down from five to three councillors (and the PTB got two elected thanks to the

alliance - the son of one MP, Bolsonaro and the daughter of another, Roberto Jefferson). In Belo Horizonte, the PT group maintains its seven councillors - their campaigns fitted in perfectly with the City Halls schema. In Salvador the PT went from six to five councillors, but it should be noted that three of them joined the party in 2003 and a fourth is the brother of the PDT mayor, Joao Henrique. In Curitiba, although the turnout rose by 14 per cent, the number of PT councillors fell from six to three.

And even in Fortaleza, in spite of the election of Luizianne Lins as mayor, the PT only had three councillors elected, two of whom had supported the candidature of Inacio Aruda. [3] These changes were even felt in Porto Alegre, where the PT went from thirteen to eleven councillors of whom only one belongs to the party's left wing.

THE DEBATE WITHIN ARTICULACAO [4]

The debate on the causes of the defeat has taken as its particular points of reference the cases of Sao Paulo and Porto Alegre. The positions of the leaders of the Articulacao tendency vary from simplistic explanations - for example making the personal rejection of Marta Suplicy responsible for the defeat, or the narrowness of the policy of alliances in Porto Alegre (Jos Genoio and the re-elected mayor of Belo Horizonte, Fernando Pimentel), or again the attitude of Senator Edouardo Suplicy (Valdemir Garreta) - and others which recognise more structural problems, such as the loss of support among middle-class layers (heavily stressed by Tarso Genro and supported by Joao Paulo and even Rui Falcao).

Joao Paulo speaks of a political and electoral defeat in the state of Sao Paulo, pointing to the absence of social orientation of the Lula administration, as well as mistakes made in his opinion by the government (such as the project of the Federal Council of Journalism or the buying of the presidential plane). Rui Falcao correctly stresses the formation of a new rentier centre which is spreading in the country, with Sao Paulo as its starting point and Governor Geraldo Alckmin as supreme leader, underlines the lack of differentiation between the PT and the PSDB and concludes that this election should serve as a warning to the federal government.

Tarso Genro analyses the PSDB as a party of modernisation, which makes it capable of competing with the PT, a party that exploits the inability of the PT to respond to the aspirations of the impoverished middle classes who previously supported it - while Rui Falcao insists on the progress of the PSDB to the detriment of declining conservative leaders like Malruf. Several of them observe that the PSDB has developed a new anti-PTism on the basis of the contradictions that exist within the PT, but Fernando Pimentel considers that the PT and the PSDB are partners, that they share the same objectives and that a common strategic project of the two parties is necessary for Brazil. But none of these analyses of the leaders of Articulacao question Palocci's economic policies or the policy of alliances with the right-wing parties. [5]

SAO PAULO, PORTO ALEGRE AND FORTALEZA

To the question - Who made Marta and Pont lose? Chico de Oliveira has replied without any ambiguity: the Lula government and its neo-liberal economic policies, which have hit the working class and impoverished the middle classes. Transformed into a mouthpiece for the Lula government, the PT suspends and expels elected representatives who criticise and is being identified in the eyes of a large part of the population with the other parties. This has corroded the attachment to the PT of important layers of social militants and left intellectuals, which is very damaging for a party that up to now claimed to be socialist and different from the traditional parties.

However some particular aspects of important cities must be separated from the general evaluation. In Sao Paulo, Marta's administration had high approval ratings, but no capacity for social mobilisation, and in the course of the electoral process, this was even further reduced by the agreements with Maluf, formalised for the second round but

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already very much present before the first round. Numerous negotiations conducted with the right-wing parties throughout her administration provoked losses in the popular camp, in particular in the health sector, and reinforced the idea that there were no substantial differences between Marta and Serra as far as their methods were concerned. [6] Furthermore the policy of highly visible public works, concentrated in the final year of her administration, left an impression of electoralism.

In Porto Alegre, the Right, rebuilt within a strong anti-PT front, had already taken the state government in 2002 and could only be beaten by raising the level of political confrontation - which was in no way helped by the mayor, Tarso Genro, abandoning the administration of the city half-way through (to devote his attention to the battle against the outgoing PT governor Olivio Dutra, whom he succeeded in eliminating in a primary) nor by the mistakes of the PT administration, nr by the advice of Duda Mendona, nor by the lowering of the Utopian horizon that was not only remarked on but above all defended by Tarso Genro.

In the capital of the World Social Forum, in the state where the PT Left has the biggest influence, the space left increasingly vacant by the militants was occupied by the political professionals and the PTs discourse was aligned with the policies of the national leaders of the party. Because of what the experience of the PT in Porto Alegre represents for the Left of the PT and for the Left internationally, this defeat was undoubtedly the most painful of these elections.

But the best contribution to their balance sheet was offered by the PT militants of Fortaleza. Rebelling against the national leadership of the PT, Luizianne Lins [7] and her comrades maintained her candidature and got it approved - by a majority of one vote - by the municipal conference of the party in the capital of the state of Ceara.

By reinvigorating the militants with her criticisms of the local oligarchs as well as of the neo-liberal policies of the Lula government, she conducted a campaign with very few material resources but with a great capacity for dialogue that corresponded to what was being experienced by the majority of the population. She showed that it was possible to fight and to win by raising the Utopian horizon. And she showed that the convergence of the electorate in the centre only takes place in the absence of a left alternative.

[1] The PSDB (Party of Brazilian Social Democracy) is a modernist split from the PMDB. It twice secured the election of Fernando Henrique Cardoso as president of Brazil, who carried out the neo-liberal turn in Brazilian politics. Today it is the main bourgeois party.

The PMDB (Party of the Brazilian Democratic Movement) originated in the MDB, the legal opposition party during the military dictatorship. Weakened by corruption scandals it is today dominated by its right wing.

The PP (Progressive Party) is a right-wing populist party. Its leader Paulo Maluf was mayor of Sao Paulo.

The PDT (Democratic Labour Party), affiliated to the Socialist International, is a populist party of the centre-left.

The PTB (Brazilian Labour party) is despite its name a right-wing party of the right, led by a banker; the PL (Liberal party) is an old right-wing party, allied with eth PT for the presidential election. It designated Jos Alencar, a big employer member of the PL, as vice-president.

The PPS (popular Socialist Party) is a social-liberal mutation of the majority of the ex-Brazilian Communist Party (pro-Moscow).

The PSB (Brazilian Socialist party) is a small social-democratic party.

The PV (Green party) is a neo-liberal ecologist party.

The PCdoB (Communist Party of Brazil) is a left party, ex-Maoist, ex-pro Albanian, which has a minister in the Lula government. It stood Inacio Aruda for mayor of Fortaleza, with the backing of the PT leadership, against Luizianne Lins.

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[2] The PFL (Party of the Liberal Front) comes from ARENA, the party of the military dictatorship.

[3] Inacio Aruda, candidate of the PCdoB for mayor of Fortaleza, came in third in the first round and had to withdraw. He had been supported by the national leadership of the PT (and by part of the PT members in Fortaleza).

[4] Articulacao (the joint) is the historical name of the majority tendency in the PT, led by Lula.

[5] Antonio Palocci is the present Minister of Finance, considered as responsible for the neo-liberal orientation of the government.

[6] Marta Suplicy (PT), outgoing mayor of Sao Paulo, was beaten on October 31st by Jos Serra (PSDB), the presidential candidate beaten by Lula in 2002.

[7] Luizianne Lins, militant of the Socialist Democracy tendency of the PT and member of the International Committee of the Fourth International, was elected as mayor of Fortaleza with 56.2 per cent of the vote in the second round (in the first round she had come second with 22.3 per cent of the vote).