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Brazil debate

Four years of debates in the Fourth International, a summary

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The Brazilian organization Socialist Democracy (DS), which took part from the very start in the building of the Workers' Party (PT) and was organised as a tendency within it, was from the 12th World Congress in 1985 an important component of the Fourth International. It took a large part in the political and theoretical development of our organization. However, since the constitution of the Lula government in January 2003, the political positions of the immense majority of the Fourth International and those of the National Coordination (leadership) of the DS have diverged, and increasingly so.

[https://www.internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/Heloisa_Helena_centre.jpg]

PSOL deputies, Heloisa Helena centre

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While considering from the start that there was at least "a doubt about the capacity of the new [Lula] government to fulfil its fundamental commitment, which consists of transforming the country in favour of the interests of the mass of the people" and stressing that "threats to the process of democratic discussion" [\[1\]](#)

had appeared within the Workers' Party, the comrades of the DS judged that they could not refuse to take part in this government and that Miguel Rossetto should accept the post of Minister for Land Reform, all the more so as the Movement of the Landless (MST) and the agrarian sector of the CUT supported his nomination.

In February 2003, this orientation was discussed during the 15th World Congress. Many speakers insisted then on the dangers of such a choice for the DS itself, as on the one hand the economic guidelines announced by the Lula government left very few means for carrying out a land reform that corresponded to the needs of the Brazilian people, and on the other hand the integration of very many comrades into positions within the state institutions could not but exert a strong material pressure on the DS. But the argument that the left wing of the PT would not be understood and would risk being marginalised if it refused to enter a government that was formed following the victory of their candidate for the presidency and which "bore great hopes, which were clearly expressed during the celebrations when it took office" [\[2\]](#), was also taken into account.

The World Congress confined itself to this oral debate and had confidence in the Brazilian section. But at the end of this debate, as well as during the meetings of the executive of the International in which the leaders of the DS took part, there seemed to be agreement that, when the first confrontation arose between the government and sectors of the masses opposed to its policies, i.e. as soon as the rupture could be understood by even one sector of the masses, the governmental participation of the comrades of the DS would be called into question, because a real left tendency of the PT could only be opposed to political measures that went against the interests of the masses.

HeloÃ-sa Helena saves our honour

That is, moreover, what Senator HeloÃ-sa Helena, member of the leadership of the DS and of the International

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Committee of the Fourth International, did from January 2003, by opposing the nomination as head of the Central Bank of Henrique Mireilles, former international president of the Bank of Boston, who was the candidate of the IMF and of international finance. That is what Heloisa Helena did again, in July 2003, by joining the demonstrators opposed to the counter-reform of pensions and by voting against this law in the Senate.

But whereas the attitude of Heloisa was approved by the majority of the leadership of the DS in January, in July, that is after six months of the government, that was no longer the case, some of the DS members of Parliament going so far as to vote in favour of the law on pensions... Within the Brazilian section of the Fourth International, a division, which was to become ever greater, appeared. Whereas the comrades of the DS had analyzed the Lula government as being "in conflict" between the interests of the workers and those of the bourgeoisie, it clearly appeared after six months that this conflict did not divide the government, but on the other hand was starting to divide the Brazilian section.

In December 2003 the national leadership of the Workers' Party took the decision to expel from the party Heloisa Helena and other members of Parliament who had voted against the law on pensions. Socialist Democracy was opposed to this internal trial, and was supported in that by the whole of the International. However, we were extremely surprised when, after the expulsion of Heloisa, and when she announced the need for a new party to defend the workers, for "a socialist rebuilding of the PT" [3], the majority of DS informed her in January 2004 that she could no longer claim to belong to... "an internal tendency within the Workers' Party", in other words that she was no longer a member of Socialist Democracy! On the other hand, Miguel Rossetto, although he did not have the means of carrying out the announced land reform, remained a minister and a leading member of the DS. And this despite the fact that the 7th National Conference of DS in November 2003 had adopted a resolution stipulating that: "the first eight months of the Lula government have been marked by the building of a set of alliances including broad bourgeois sectors, by a thoroughly conservative economic policy and moreover by limited progress in promoting change" [4].

In February 2004, the International Committee of the Fourth International discussed the Brazilian situation at the end of the first year of the Lula government - characterized in the international report as "having confirmed the continuity of the commitments of the Brazilian state to the IMF" and "even being considered as one of its best pupils" [5] - and after the repression of the opponents within the PT. Comrades Joaquim Soriano (representing the majority of the direction of the DS) and Heloisa Helena took part in this meeting, which quite naturally confirmed the status as members of International of the comrades who had been expelled from the PT by its bureaucratic and right-wing leadership and of those who had followed them out of solidarity.

However the leading body of the Fourth International refrained from voting on an orientation for Brazil, considering that that was the task of the Brazilian comrades, even though during the oral debate the idea that predominated was that it had for several months become essential to assert the distance of the Brazilian Left from the policies of the Lula government, and thus to no longer take part in this government. A written discussion on the political situation in Brazil was opened within the International and throughout the next year documents amounting to several hundred thousand characters, translated into four languages - English, Spanish, French and, exceptionally, so that all the Brazilian members take part in the debate, Portuguese - were placed at the disposal of the sections.

In January 2005, before the Social Forum in Porto Alegre [6] three of the leaders of the Fourth International who had been, since the creation of Socialist Democracy, engaged in its policy debates - Daniel Bensaïd, Francisco Louça and Michael Löwy - addressed a letter to the members of Socialist Democracy [7] In it they analyzed the evolution of the PT, noted that the bureaucratic measures taken illustrated the transformation of the party into a conveyor belt for transmitting governmental decisions to society and that the constitution of the Party of Socialism and Freedom (PSoL) should be considered as an "act of self-defence". They suggested organising the left of the PT around a clear alternative programme, that those who wished to should contribute to building the PSoL, and especially that a dialogue should be established between the Left within the PT and the small independent forces like the PSoL.

Finally, they insisted: "the electoral calendar will oblige us to make, as from 2006, clear choices", 2006 being an electoral year.

In contradiction with our principles

In February 2005, the members of the majority of the direction of the DS did not take part in the meeting of the International Committee, for the first time since the DS was recognized as a section (whereas the comrades of the minority of the DS had for their part come to the meeting). In spite of this absence, the IC continued the discussion on the Brazilian situation, adopted the general line of the letter addressed to the members of the DS by the three above-mentioned comrades, and adopted a resolution.

It affirmed: "Since the formation of the Lula government there have been in the International reservations, doubts and disagreements concerning the participation of the Socialist Democracy tendency in the government and the modalities of this participation (...). Nevertheless, once the decision had been taken by the DS, and taking account of the arguments put forward by the majority of the Brazilian comrades, the International had decided, at the beginning of the process, not to adopt a resolution and to accompany the experience (...). The International thus avoided posing the question of participation in the Lula government in dogmatic terms, without taking account of the characteristics of the country, of the history of the Workers' Party and of its links with the social and trade-union movements. After the experience of these last two years (...) there is no longer any doubt that occupying positions in the Lula government, either at ministerial level, or through other politically responsible functions, is contradictory with the building of an alternative in Brazil that is coherent with our programmatic positions" [8] .

Concerning the divisions that had emerged within the DS, the IC took a position "for the maintenance of relations with all the components of the Fourth International in Brazil - all of these components remaining members of the International, with full rights - with the objective of encouraging dialogue, relations and the unity of action of all these components, with the perspective of building a political alternative to the Lula government " [9]. After a period of silence, the majority of DS reacted in December 2005, by publishing on the web site Inprecor, publicación de la IV Internacional para América Latina y el Caribe [10] a polemic by Joaquim Soriano [11] along with an article by François Sabado [12] on the evolution of the Brazilian Left, accusing the majority of the International of " 'bad internationalism', infested with the vices of the 20th century".

In February 2006 the International Committee once again held its meeting in the absence of those of its members who were part of the leadership of the DS, whereas the comrades who were taking part in building the PSol were present. A discussion led to the adoption (by 25 votes against 2) of a resolution "On the political situation in Brazil and the division of our forces" [13]. This resolution reiterated that the Lula government "is indeed a social-liberal government " and that its policies "contrary to the interests of the masses, have been accompanied, over the last year, by revelations about political methods and corrupt practices which are in no way different from those of traditional bourgeois governments". It noted that "the major part of the left of the PT, including the comrades of the DS-PT, did not defend, at the time of the last internal elections in the party, a policy of rupture with this government" and that the DS "is continuing to be active in this party, by confirming its participation in the government and by reinforcing its integration into the leadership of the party - a leading member of the DS occupying the post of general secretary of the PT".

Support for Heloãsa Helena, not for Lula

After having indicated a year earlier than "the year 2006 will oblige us to make clear choices", the IC noted that "the

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candidacy of Lula for the presidency represents the reaffirmation of his social-liberal policies" whereas the candidacy of our comrade Heloisa Helena, presented by the PSoL, "can make it possible for millions of Brazilians to express their readiness to resist the attacks of liberal capitalism and to change things", to "to rally a radical Left, an anti-capitalist Left" and "to take up again the programme and the original fundamental values of the PT, which have since been abandoned by the Lula leadership". The leadership of the International thus clearly chose its camp, on the side of the PSoL.

However, "to encourage the pursuit of the discussion and the possibilities of convergence of all the anti-capitalist sectors " the International Committee reaffirmed "the maintenance of relations with all the components of the Fourth International in Brazil, all its components continuing to be members, with full rights, of the International". Within this framework, it mandated the Bureau to continue the discussion with the comrades of the DS.

Meeting in March 2006, the National Coordination of Socialist Democracy adopted for its part a resolution entitled "An internationalist policy for the 21st century", which reiterated the argumentation of the article by Joaquim Soriano and refrained from any in-depth discussion on Brazil. This document considered that "on the initiative of the leading bodies of the Fourth International, a trajectory of common work and mutual respect was thus interrupted", which could be interpreted as a rupture with the Fourth International, even though the resolution stated in addition that "the DS will continue its internationalist work with those sectors of the Fourth International with which it already has relations of mutual collaboration". Since for more than twenty years the DS had had a relation of mutual collaboration with the whole of the Fourth International, all of its "sectors" - which we call "national sections" - have the right to feel concerned.

The executive of the International decided to let time pass – since the election campaign in Brazil did not constitute a favourable moment for a relaxed discussion on internationalism, and since other more important tasks took up our forces. A reply to the document of the National Coordination of the DS was addressed to it at the beginning of 2007, in preparation for the meeting of the International Committee in February, which was to discuss, among other things, this subject. The members of the CI from the leadership of the DS once again did not consider it useful to take part in this debate. We hope, however, that among the hundreds of comrades of the DS who have not yet joined the PSoL and who want to build a left within the PT, there are many who do not want to break with the International, of whose discussions they have not been informed by the present leadership of the DS. It is above all to them that the answer published here is addressed.

[1] Article, "The two souls of Lula's government", written by João Machado Borges Neto on January 17, 2003, representing a collective point of view of the leadership of Socialist Democracy, published in *International Viewpoint* n° 348, March 2003.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Resolution of the 7th National Conference of Socialist Democracy, November 2003.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Cf. *International Viewpoint* n° 357, March 2004.

[6] For the first time since the beginning of the Social Forums, the city of Porto Alegre was no longer governed by the PT, Raul Pont, historic leader of the DS and the PT, having been defeated by a candidate of the bourgeoisie, thus illustrating the disappointment of a part of the left electorate with the policies of the Lula government.

[7] Documents of the FI, February 2005

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid.

[10] This web site has been, since March 2003, run by the comrades of the DS within the framework of the sharing of tasks within the International. It should be noted that the comrades have not reproduced on this site the resolutions of the Fourth International over the last two years and that the last publication of a position coming from the majority of the International (my comments on the polemic by Joaquim Soriano against François Sabado) dates from March 2006...

[11] Cf. Joaquim Soriano, "A `bad internationalism' and unenlightened ideas about the Brazilian PT", International Viewpoint n° 374, January 2006. My comments on the argumentation of Joaquim Soriano were published in issue n° 375, February 2006.

[12] François Sabado, "Brazil: Crisis and rebirth of the Left ", International Viewpoint, n° 371, October 2005.

[13] Documents of the FI, "Resolution on Brazil", February 2006.