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Brazil debate

# An internationalist policy for the 21st century

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**Socialist Democracy, a tendency within the PT, is a current that has characterised itself as internationalist from its beginnings. The aim of this document is to update the meaning of this characterisation, considering the new regional and world situation and the state of the left internationally and in Latin America.**

## A new political period

The crisis of legitimacy of the neo-liberal project in Latin America, as a result of this programme's own impasses and the popular resistance to its application, has opened up a new political period in the region. The rise in social struggles and the advance, at an institutional level, of left and progressive parties, are an expression of this new situation. The traditional hegemony of North-American imperialism in our region, which it sees as its "back-yard", is being questioned.

## A new situation for the left

The crisis of "existing socialism" at the high point of neo-liberal hegemony, between the end of the 1980s and the first half the 1990s, deeply affected the international left.

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The idea, which was promoted even among ourselves, in Brazil, that this was just a crisis for Stalinism and its heirs, does not stand up. That crisis meant, in large measure, a reshaping of the left in the whole world. There were significant losses when sizeable sectors went over to the neo-liberal camp or abandoned political activity. But it was also the case that the old ideological frontiers built up during the XXth century, especially those relating to the debate over the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, were gradually eroded in the face of the new realities and new challenges thrown up by the XXIst century. In some cases this process gave rise to fusions between previously opposing groups.

The re-emergence of social struggles at the end of the 1990s and in the current decade was to unfold over a new political landscape. Contrary to the history of the left in the last century, there are no longer any established hegemonies nor are there any political forces capable of leading this process on their own.

There are, however, new strategic questions, new theoretical and political challenges. And in the face of these, areas of socialist and internationalist political construction begin to emerge, along with new polarisations. At our Extraordinary Conference (April 2005), we emphasised one of these central questions, on the basis of the reality we experience in Brazil and in Latin America:

"While we need to understand the crisis of legitimacy affecting neo-liberalism, we also need to take account of a historical perspective in which revolutions of an anti-capitalist nature, capable of providing a reference point and a pole of attraction for a new epoch of socialist revolutions, are not foreseeable in the short or medium term. In such a period we must resist the risks of pragmatism, of making utopian perspectives conform to a supposedly reformable capitalism, of sterilizing the forces of emancipation by integrating them into the order of the bourgeois state and the

market. These risks are key for socialist parties that have come to government in their countries, like the PT. Fighting adaptation or integration into the bourgeois order demands a historic response, one based on the revolutionary socialist tradition, that takes up the challenge of advancing the ability to lead a democratic transition to socialism, in the framework of pluralism, participatory democracy, and the progressive overcoming of the privatising logic of the market, and in dialectical relation with a process of transforming the dominant world order.”m (Resolutions of the DS Extraordinary National Conference, April 2005)

## Premises of an Internationalism for the 21st century

The debate over an “internationalism for the 21st century” should recover the values and the positive legacy of the four previous internationals, but should also make a balance sheet of their errors. It should identify the new actors that exist today, as well as those that have remained (after the general crisis of the left at the beginning of the last decade). And it should, above all, be capable of promoting an open and plural internationalism, closely linked to the struggles taking place.

We belong to a tradition in the socialist movement that has in internationalism one of its constitutive, strategic values. Our struggle should have common objectives throughout the world.

The universal fraternity of peoples is a value to be pursued and, just as capital has globalised its domination, so there can be no isolated development of socialism in one country or another. A post neo-liberal project, to be coherent, must be socialist and internationalist. Anti-imperialism, the defence of our peoples’ national sovereignty, denouncing and confronting the underdeveloped condition of our countries and the ruling class’s alliance with international capital, theoretical and ideological elaboration in the struggle for socialism, ethics and morality in politics, the continual struggle for a participatory democracy and the necessary development of political forces with class independence and the capacity to carry all this out – these are the fundamental conditions for the transition and for overcoming neo-liberalism.

## The internationalism of the 29th century

The last century was marked by a series of confrontations between international projects of the left: social democracy (of the II<sup>nd</sup> International) vs communism (of the III<sup>rd</sup> International); stalinism (of the PCs) vs trotskyism (of the IV<sup>th</sup> International); Moscow line vs, Peking line; in Latin America, organizations identified with the Cuban revolution vs communist parties. These dividing lines have lost much of their relevance, even if strategic debates of the left in the 20th century continue to be of fundamental importance. But new polarities are also emerging in a situation where there are big challenges and the answers are still fermenting.

The old dividing lines also meant that the class struggle was often subordinated to the logic of a dispute between the apparatuses of different left currents. This sometimes blocked the class struggle itself.

The experience of the IV<sup>th</sup> International in the 20th century was unusual, since unlike the other currents, as a rule it did not become a part of mass parties nor did it lead mass organisations, and it never became the policy of any state. Founded in 1938 as a result of the struggle of the left oppositions against stalinism, it was seen by Trotsky, at the time of its creation, as an instrument for defending the revolutionary programme (against the degeneration operated by Stalinism on the one hand, and by social democracy on the other). At the time, the working class of the central

countries was under the political leadership of Stalinist communism or social democracy, or directly subjected to nazi-fascism, and the world was on the eve of the 2nd World War. This founding framework (the “defence of the programme”), together with the persistence, for a long period, of a marginal situation in relation to the working class, and of sectarian and doctrinaire habits encouraged by the smallness of their organisations, served as a justification for the course followed by many fourth international organisations as they degenerated into political sects (inward-looking, outside the political situation and mainly dedicated to fighting each other, etc).

# Trotskyism or revolutionary Marxism?

The convergence between DS and the Fourth International (USEC) came about as a result of several factors. Firstly, it was fundamental that the FI approved at its XIth World Congress, in 1979, the document “Socialist Democracy and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat”, recovering a radically democratic vision of the struggle to build socialism.

Secondly, at that time, the IVth International ceased to consider itself the “world party of revolution” or to try to have an international leadership that centralized its national sections.

Thirdly, it said it was no longer possible to work with the idea that a mass revolutionary international would form “around” or “under the leadership” of the IVth International, but that the FI would be one of its components, with the perspective of a shared vanguard, not one hegemonized by this or that current. This perspective was fundamental for opening a dialogue with other revolutionary currents, especially in Central America in the 1980s.

Fourthly, various thinkers linked to the IVth International were already working with a view of revolutionary marxism that went beyond exclusive reference to Trotsky and included all the influences of critical and revolutionary thought (many of them contradictory with the trotskyist legacy).

The fifth and most important point is that, as it drew closer to the IVth International, DS was accepted for what it was, a unique experience. Unlike most trotskyism, DS did not see its participation in the PT as an “entryist” tactic. To understand this particularity, it is enough to compare the trajectory of DS within the PT with that of Socialist Convergence, the ‘morenoite’ predecessor of the current PSTU.

In this period, the relationship of debate and exchange with the IV International contributed to our strategic formulations on the democratic, national and transitional questions.

## Internationalism and national roots

Jose Carlos Mariategui, the great Peruvian marxist thinker, stated in 1928:

“We certainly do not want socialism in America to be a copy or reproduction. It must be a heroic creation. We have to give life, with our own reality, in our own idiom, to indo-american socialism. This is a task worthy of a new generation.” (from the article ‘Anniversary and Balance Sheet’, Amauta magazine, Year III, No 17, Lima, September 1928)

This was the period when Mariategui was struggling inside the IIIrd International against the mechanical application, in Peru, of its decisions – something that Stalinism only managed to achieve after his death in 1930. The IIIrd

International claimed to be the “world party of revolution” and, a little later (1943), closed down its activities as part of an agreement between the USSR and the imperialist states.

Marxism arrived in our continent as an ‘out-of-place’ ideology. There have now been 150 years of mutual exchange between our peoples, who have sought in marxism a tool for their liberation, and marxism, which, to be a universal school of thought, needs to de-europeanise itself. Trotskyism also suffered from the same problem.

Not only did DS not position itself as an ‘implant’ in the PT, it also sought, from the beginning, to take part in collective processes of synthesis within it, both with the PT left and with the party as a whole. The whole debate on revolutionary strategy, on socialism and on building the revolutionary party carried out by DS throughout the 1980s and 1990s is steeped in this vision. When DS decided to express its identity with the FI in the middle of the 1980s, the latter decided to respect this trajectory and this perspective. Thus internationalism never meant, for us, negating national roots or the need to re-appropriate and recreate revolutionary marxism.

## The new stage and its actors

The convergence between neo-liberal crisis and popular upsurge in our region is leading to a new situation. With the revival of popular struggles after the crisis of the left, new actors are emerging and old ones are regenerating themselves. For good or for ill, the world is different now. The broad spaces that have opened up for united struggles against the various expressions of neo-liberal globalisation, are only possible because of this new situation in which the various forces of the left find themselves internationally, and especially in our continent.

Members of DS have played a prominent part in building international spaces and links like the World Social Forum, the Assembly of Social Movements, the Continental Campaign Against the FTAA, the Continental Social Alliance, the World Women’s March, the Southern Cone Co-ordination of Trade Union Confederations, the forums of workers in the social economy, among other initiatives that have represented important advances for the struggle against neo-liberal globalisation, imperialism, war and patriarchy in our continent.

The big impact of recent actions against Bush and the FTAA at the Peoples’ Summit (promoted by the Continental Social Alliance), at Mar del Plata, was a concrete demonstration of the correctness of this internationalist policy. The significant political advances made at the World Social Forum in Caracas, this January, indicate the same thing.

These achievements are neither foreign to nor contradictory with our national orientation. On the contrary, they are the international extension of the same thing. And this orientation is based on a vision of the situation and the tasks in our continent as expressed in the resolutions of our last two conferences.

Although it first arose fifteen years ago in a different political context, the São Paulo Forum has managed to survive as a meeting space for a wide range of left and progressive parties in Latin America. We argue that the Forum should play a more active role in debating the balance sheet of the experiences of government in our region, in making links between different party initiatives and in building a strategic partnership with the campaigns developed by the social movements of Latin America.

## Narrow internationalism vs internationalism for the 21st century

## An internationalist policy for the 21st century

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The crisis suffered by the Brazilian left in the debate over the course of the Lula government has been a pretext for the comrades of the FI to change profoundly the behaviour of mutual collaboration that existed for years with DS. The majority of its International Executive Committee (IEC) assumed powers it does not have. It tried to intervene in DS, deciding who should represent it at the IEC, who should be regarded as members of DS and what DS is. In the same way, in relation to the political situation in Brazil, it tried to decide in Europe what DS should do in Brazil – ignoring that DS has its own decision-making structure based on internal democracy.

For two years the factional and anti-democratic behaviour of some sectors then in DS were supported by manoeuvres operated out of bodies of the FI. Thus came an interruption, initiated by the leadership bodies of the Fourth International, in the history of joint work and mutual respect.

On the other hand, in our region, in the last period, the majority of the IEC has decided to distance itself from the processes of recomposition underway in the Latin American left and to give priority to dialogue and joint work with small “trotskyist” groups that have survived in our continent.

There is a rich process of re-composition on the left internationally and in Latin America, of which DS is an active part. It is on this, and within this, that we should develop our reflection and contribution.

A new internationalism is necessary and it is being built in the struggles, in the campaigns and in the unitary regional and international spaces. The sectors that have not become contaminated with the spirit of factionalism and the sect – where some, anachronistically, seek refuge – will be our natural allies in this undertaking. DS will continue its internationalist work with those sectors of the IV International with which it already has a relation of mutual collaboration and with all sectors of the international, regional and Brazilian left that are ready to renew internationalism and make it capable of confronting the challenge of building socialism in the XXIst century.