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Obituary

Brazil: Death of Plá-nio de Arruda Sampaio

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On July 8, 2014 Plínio de Arruda Sampaio, one of the principal militants of the Christian socialist left in Brazil, died in Sao Paulo at the age of 84.

From a wealthy background, Plinio started his militancy with the Catholic University Youth (JUC). A lawyer by profession, before the military coup d'état of 1964 he was elected federal deputy for the Christian Democrat Party (PDC); he was one of the principal leaders of its left wing. Immediately after the military coup, his mandate was revoked and his political rights suspended. He went into exile, initially in Chile, then in the United States.

He returned to Brazil in 1976, before the end of the military dictatorship. He then started to articulate the organization of a socialist party. The attempt failed, but shortly afterwards Plinio took part in the formation of the PT (Workers' Party), founded in 1980. He became a PT federal deputy in 1986 and candidate for the post of governor of São Paulo in 1990.

In the first years of the PT Plínio was regarded as a leader of its more moderate sector. However, when the PT began its process of integration in the bourgeois order, Plínio gradually became one of the leaders of the left wing of the party. An expert on land questions, he was one of the party leaders closest to the MST (Movement of Landless Workers).

At the beginning of the Lula government in 2003, although already critical of the course followed by the party, Plínio still collaborated with it, in particular in the formulation of a programme of land reform. The fact that this reform was not implemented was one [of the decisive factors which convinced him that the integration into the existing order of the PT was irreversible.

In September 2005, Plínio was one of leaders of approximately 2,000 left activists who broke with the PT to form the PSOL (Party of Socialism and Freedom). Then 75 years old, he was not frightened to say that "we need to start again". His health was already fragile, but his role in the construction of PSOL was decisive. In 2006, he was candidate for the post of governor of São Paulo, and from the discussions of the first Congress of the PSOL, in 2007, he became a leader of the left of the party. He defined himself as "a Communist who believes in God".

It is as a representative of the left of the party which that he won the nomination as PSOL candidate for the Brazilian presidency in 2010. Although his election campaign was not a success in terms of votes (886,800 votes, 0.87% of the total) it had a very positive impact at the political level. Then already 80 years old, he had a campaign directed towards young people and future, and received a reception well beyond that reflected in the vote (many voters who identified with his ideas opted for the "useful vote").

In June 2013, he took part in the demonstrations. At the Congress of the PSOL in that year, he participated in the Left Bloc of the party.

His funeral was attended by Christians, PSOL activists, left activists from the pre-dictatorship period, old PT comrades, representatives of other left parties (PSTU and PCB), militants of the MST, and trade unionists. And many young people.