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Brazilian Workers Party Crisis

Concerning a Polemic

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Description:

Jan Malewski replies to Joaquim Soriano, a leading member of the Socialist democracy tendency in the Brazilian Workers Party (PT), on the characterisation that International Viewpoint and other Fourth International journals have made of the crisis in the PT and the recently formed left split from the PT, the P-SoL.

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In October 2005 the central press organs of the International (International Viewpoint and French Inprecor) published an [article by Francois Sabado](#) which was devoted to the crisis and rebirth of the Brazilian Left [1]. Translated into Spanish and published on the web site <http://www.inprecor.org.br>, this article provoked [a polemic from Joaquim Soriano](#), a member of the leadership of the Workers' Party (PT) of Brazil, in the name of the Socialist Democracy tendency [2]. This polemic merits a few comments:

1) As presented by Joaquim Soriano, the Workers' Party is an ideal party. No mention is made concerning its deep crisis, which has led to the resignation from their positions of some of its principal leaders, including Jose Dirceu, who was number two in the government [3]. So the polemic is more eloquent in what it keeps quiet about than in what it says.



Supporters of the Movement of the Landless march in Brazil

2) Joaquim centres his reply on the interpretation of the facts. Let us just take one example. Joaquim's affirmation that the failure of the candidacy of comrade Raul Pont in the second round of the internal elections for the presidency of the PT is due to the departure from the party of Plinio de Arruda Sampaio and those who backed his candidacy (including the militants of the minority of Socialist Democracy) is surprising: in the first round of this election 315,000 members of the PT voted, in the second only 230,000 did so.

Since no one claims that 85,000 members of the PT left the party at the end of September 2005 to join the PSOL (or to go anywhere else) we have to look for another explanation...A more convincing one would be that the electors who were mobilized for the first round in a clientelist fashion (buses to take them to where the voting took place, etc.) by the other candidates were not mobilized in the same way for the second round, even though these candidates had called for a vote for Raul Pont.

3) Joaquim rejects the idea that there should be a coming together of the militants from the Left of the PT and from the PSOL and affirms that "this thesis only exists on the other side of the Atlantic". We can only refer him to the article by Jose Correia Leite [4] - which was written in Sao Paulo - and regret that once again those who constitute the principal current of the PT Left want there to be an ocean separating them from the PSOL.

4) As far as the elections of 2006 are concerned, Joaquim opts for irony, accusing Francois Sabado of "making the entire Brazilian Right disappear"! However the question remains: Lula will try to be re-elected, as the candidate of the PT, on the basis of the balance sheet of his first term.

If the PT Left chooses to support him, its own criticisms of the policies of the Lula government - self-limiting and formulated in a diplomatic manner though they may be - will disappear from view. Only the candidacy of Heloisa

Concerning a Polemic

Helena will be capable of trying to oppose this record of running the interests of finance capital with elements of an anti-capitalist alternative.

For militants who defend socialism, the choice will not be between different tactics, but between the defence or the abandoning of their ideas. Does Joaquim think that the Left should defend the policies carried out by Finance Minister Palocci - whom he knows to be a neo-liberal - against the criticisms formulated by Heloisa Helena, just because Palocci is a member of the PT, whereas Heloisa formed the PSOL after having been expelled from the PT (against the - at that time - unanimous opposition of the DS)?

5) Joaquim Soriano accuses Francois Sabado of ignoring "the basic principles of revolutionary internationalism", which he sums up as "a relation based on solidarity between revolutionaries of different nations and on respect for the processes of national construction in each country".

It is of course necessary to have relations based on solidarity. But they also have to be based on frankness and free discussion. It is necessary to open the debate "between revolutionaries of different nations" on the balance sheet of the Lula government and of the party that supports it, of which he is a member.

Joaquim argues in favour of an "internationalism for the 21st century". Let us hope that this internationalism will never be limited to uncritical support for those revolutionaries who exercise even small elements of power, in the name of the fact that they exercise them in their country, because the history of the workers' movement in the 20th century has taught what such tail-ending can lead to.

Our tradition - and at least up to now it was also the tradition of the comrades of Socialist Democracy - is more inspired by that of Rosa Luxemburg, who while demonstrating unbounded solidarity with the Russian Revolution, did not hesitate to criticize those orientations of its leadership which seemed to her to be mistaken.

6) Finally, Joaquim mentions the "enormous mistakes that the Fourth International has made" in the past. And it is true that the history of the Trotskyist movement has been marked by splits over tactical differences, which have all too often led to the crystallization of competing organizations, which were not separated by programmatic differences.

Participation in the Lula government and its characterization by the comrades of the majority of Socialist Democracy as a government whose orientation remained undetermined provoked a debate in the Fourth International from January 2003. It was only in February 2005 - after two years of internal debate - that the International Committee [adopted a position](#) against participation in such a government and on the divisions among the comrades in Brazil on the question. [5].

In so doing the highest body of the International took a position "in favour of maintaining relations with all the components of the Fourth International in Brazil - with the aim of favouring dialogue, relations and unity in action between all these components". For his part, comrade Joaquim writes that "no collaboration is possible" with the PSOL...Everyone must judge where the "factionalism" lies.

The socialist Left in Brazil is going through a difficult period because of the record of the Lula government and of the majority of the leadership of the PT. Such a conjuncture is favourable to divisions and to the crystallization of differences, which can only make it more difficult for the Left to launch the necessary counter-offensive.

But whereas often in the past the differences between revolutionary Marxist militants could not be - because they

Concerning a Polemic

were such a minority - put to the test of practice, in Brazil today the situation is different. Those who have chosen to build the PSOL and those who are pursuing within the PT a critique of left neo-liberalism have real political means at their disposal and it will be possible to draw the balance sheet of the use they put them to.

Let us hope that this will make it possible to overcome the differences between those who are engaged in the struggle for the socialism of the 21st century.

[1] "Crisis and rebirth of the Left", International Viewpoint, October 2005.

[2] "A bad internationalism - and unenlightened ideas about the Brazilian PT", International Viewpoint, January 2006.

[3] "The most serious crisis in the Workers' Party's history", International Viewpoint, June 2005.

[4] International Viewpoint will shortly be publishing an article by Jose Correia Leite, "Shifts in the Left reinforce the PSOL".

[5] "On the Brazilian situation", International Viewpoint, March 2005