



# Brazil: Expulsions from PT start moves for new party

Stuart King Wed, 04/02/2004 - 23:00

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In the middle of December the Brazilian Workers Party (PT) Directorate voted by 55 to 27 to expel four members of the PT parliamentary group for daring to vote against the PT government's attacks on state employees' pensions.

The so-called "pension reforms" were part of a series of agreements with the IMF and Washington aimed at cutting state expenditure and aiding various privatisation measures. Around the same time as the expulsions, the IMF approved its new package of loans for Brazil and George Bush phoned President Lula to congratulate him on the government's performance. Little wonder then that leading PTers have referred to the emergence of a "tropical Blairism" in the party and that the PT has gone into a deep period of soul searching.

In this context it was absolutely necessary for the party's leadership to take a hard line against the dissidents. They were determined to show that there had to be discipline within the party. They needed it to carry out a series of anti-working class measures that were causing growing discontent among the workers and landless poor who had placed their hopes for radical change in the new PT government (see *Workers Power* 278).

One of the best known of the expelled members is Senator Heloisa Helena of the Socialist Democracy (DS) tendency (a group in the PT linked to the United Secretariat of the Fourth International - USEC). Two other expelled deputies are members of organised left groups: Luciano Genro is a member of the Movement of the Socialist Left (MES), and Joao Batista 'Baba' a member of the CTS - Socialist Workers Tendency.

The reformist policies of the Lula government and its determination to follow the conservative policies of the IMF have led to a growing chorus of criticism from prominent members of the PT. The expulsions of left critics have added to the sense of crisis in the party and numerous resignations have followed. "This is not the first year of the Workers' Party government, it's the ninth year of the Fernando Henrique Cardoso government," said Francisco de Oliveira, a founder of the party, referring to the right wing president who preceded Lula. Even the rightist Democratic Labour Party, sensing the need to act left, has departed from the government accusing the Workers' Party leaders of abandoning their principles and selling out to international capitalism. Lula increasingly relies on the large right-wing parties in Congress to push his measures through.

The question is how to relate to this crisis. Clearly the millions of workers and peasants who voted for the PT government, and the tens of thousands of PT militants who spent 20 years building the party, will not easily give up on a struggle to reclaim the party - nor should they. At the same time the vanguard, sections of workers under attack and the landless labourers being offered little, are deeply disillusioned. Meanwhile the sections of the left willing to defend the interest of the workers not the capitalists find themselves expelled from the PT.

The DS Tendency linked to the USEC has one answer. Of its six elected parliamentarians, only Senator Heloisa voted against the attack on pension rights - the rest voted for, or abstained, citing PT party discipline as an excuse for saving their skins. Miguel Rossetto, a DS member, remains as a minister in the bourgeois government, responsible for an Agrarian Reform programme that is settling fewer landless peasants than its right wing predecessor. Other members of DS staff many of the other ministries. At a recent DS conference a resolution calling for the withdrawal of DS members from the Ministry of Public Finances, the most right wing ministry, received only 10 per cent of the votes. No one, of course, called for Rossetto to protest the right wing policies by resigning. The DS tendency, far from acting like communist revolutionaries, act like the left tail of a rightist social democratic government, trying to moderate an

increasingly rightist government from the inside, in fact providing it with left cover.

The expelled deputies and Senator Heloisa, now sitting as independents along with other left figures, have put out a call for a "Left Democratic Socialist Movement for a new party". They say,

"We do not accept that a government, whose majority is made up of the Workers' Party, can present as great conquests those things that only serve the interests of the market speculators. We consider, therefore, that Lula's government is determined to undertake the task which was done in the past by institutional social democracy - to do for big capital what the traditional right wing was not able to achieve. We have the right, if not the obligation, to build a party political alternative, to occupy the ground which they have abandoned. An alternative party of struggle, against the neoliberal model and the government which is applying it, in defence of the demands and banners of the working class."

If they can link this struggle to a fight inside the PT to overturn the expulsions through a special conference and to reverse the right-wing policies of the Lula leadership - they could offer a real alternative to the hundreds of thousands of workers and peasants looking for a movement and party offering real, revolutionary change in Brazil.

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