



Why we say vote Lula

Wed, 09/01/2002 - 23:00

The League for the Fifth International does not think that Lula is a socialist, but workers and peasants should vote for him in order to force through their demands and expose him to pressure from below

Luis Inacio da Silva's last campaign rally before the first round voting began on 6 October was held before an audience of the industrial workers of Sao Paulo, where, as a metal worker and union leader, he led a series of illegal strikes 25 years ago.

Walter Geronimo, a worker at the Ford assembly plant said: "If he wins, we'll have one of us in Brazilia. We will recover many of the conquests we have lost in recent years."

Geraldo Bras, a welder at the Volkswagen plant, echoed the illusions in the Workers Party leader. "Lula is the only hope for the poor because he was once poor himself," he said.

At the same rally, according the Financial Times, while the mass ranks of workers hung on Lula's every word, when he introduced his running mate and textile millionaire Jose Alencar, the crowd greeted the vice-presidential candidate with "muted applause". This scene perfectly expresses the illusions the mass of workers have in Lula and the PT and the distrust and hostility towards his bourgeois minder. Revolutionaries who want to break workers' attachment to the PT need a tactic in this election grounded in this reality.

Despite its reformist degeneration the PT has retained the loyalty of the mass of workers and landless labourers who desire socialist change in Brazil the vast majority of the Brazilian vanguard. After a series of setbacks in the 1990s the party made an important surge forward in the municipal elections of 2001.

It controls six state capitals, has mayors in 187 cities and is in power in 17 major municipalities. It controls much of the huge industrial belt around Sao Paulo and is estimated to have 600,000 members. It is supported by the CUT, the major union federation, and is closely associated with the MST, the powerful landless labourers' movement. Despite the expulsions of the 1990s it is still possible for the left to organise openly within the party, and the PT has a number of organised tendencies.

Tens of millions of organised and unorganised workers will vote for Lula and for real change. The masses, faced with an accelerating crisis, will expect the PT to deliver a better life. The unions will expect more jobs and an end to poverty wages, the landless movement the MST is already demanding an immediate radical redistribution of land, the masses of the favelas will expect improvements in housing, health and education.

All will expect a PT government to stand up to the IMF and Washington and to defend their interests. This is what the international banks and investors are really worried about will the PT be their reliable agent or will it be driven by its mass base to take actions against them?

Whether the millions of PT supporters impose their will on the government will depend both on the depth of the crisis and the leadership they are given in the struggle to combat it. Immediately militants in the PT should fight for the leadership to break its alliance with Alencar and ally themselves instead with the unions, the MST and other workers' organisations.

But in opposition the PT leadership can continue to pose as the champion of the poor and the landless. Revolutionaries

fight to put the PT to the test of office so as to more easily break workers' illusions in it. Wherever it is possible in the congressional/state elections we argue that workers should vote for PT candidates but not for candidates of the Liberal Party (PL) with which it is in alliance, even if this invalidates the ballot.

In the Presidential election we advocate crossing off the name of Vice-Presidential candidate Jose Alencar of the PL. Our aim is to indicate that militant workers and revolutionaries should vote for Lula to put him to the test of office but on no account should we vote for a bourgeois candidate or party.

We demand that Lula break with the bourgeoisie and carry out the demands of the militant rank and file of the PT, MST and CUT: to repudiate the debt paid already many times over to the imperialist banks through crippling interest rates; to initiate a massive redistribution of land, legalise current land occupations, and renationalise all privatised companies.

We do this in the context of fighting for a revolutionary action programme to mobilise the workers in struggle with the PT/CUT/MST leaders when they fight, without them when they retreat. Such a programme has to have answers to mass unemployment, the appalling lack of housing, the poor education, non-existent health and sanitary services in the shanty towns.

To provide these basic services demands an emergency plan of public works financed by the government training and employing tens of thousands of workers at a living wage set by the trade unions and under the democratic control of the workers and communities.

To meet the basic needs of the working class a decent minimum wage, unemployment benefit, a free health service and so on demands that the government introduces steep progressive taxation and a large wealth tax on the super rich of Brazil one of the most grossly unequal societies in the world.

To provide the resources for and control of such a programme all the basic utilities electricity, water, gas/oil, transport and so on. need to be brought back under state ownership, renationalised without compensation and placed under to control of the workers and users.

The same should happen to any firm trying to reduce output or make its workers redundant. The growing numbers of landless and impoverished small farmers need to be addressed by the expropriation of the large landowners and the redistribution of land to the landless. The small farmers need to be provided with cheap credit, machinery and fertilisers and co-operatives, backed by the government, need to be organised.

Such measures would only be the start of a real transformation of Brazil. Even then they would provoke an immediate reaction from the international capitalists and their agents in Brazil. The workers would face financial sabotage, investment strikes, mass closures, international blockades and mobilisations by the employers against a government that dared take such measures.

Only a revolutionary workers' government, one prepared to rely on, and arm the masses, one determined to destroy the very system of capitalism that condemns the mass of Brazilians to poverty, could hope to defeat such an onslaught.

Source URL: <https://fifthinternational.org/content/why-we-say-vote-lula>