



“Socialist ideology, *democratic* *programme*”

The Brazilian Workers Party prepares for elections



FRANCISCO WEFFORT, currently professor of Political Science at the University of Sao Paulo, was a founding member of the Brazilian Workers' Party (the Partido dos Trabalhadores, or PT), and served as a member of the PT's executive committee from 1979 to 1987. Since 1987, when he left his fulltime position on the executive, he has remained an active member, and is one of the party's most-widely respected intellectuals. GAY SEIDMAN interviewed him for the LABOUR BULLETIN when he visited South Africa in late July.



Bulletin: *In 1989, Brazil held its first direct presidential elections in 29 years, following years of military dictatorship. Lula, the PT candidate, came within a few percentage points of*

winning. What are the chances that Lula will win the presidential election in December 1994?

Weffort: I would say that Lula has a good chance of winning. This is not just personal opinion: Lula comes first in public opinion polls, with 25 to 30%. Probably Brazil will be polarised between the left and the right in the election; Lula is certainly the most authoritative representative of the left. I would say he has a real chance of winning and forming a new government.

The PT's national executive committee is now trying to make alliances for the campaign and for the new government. We have an electoral system made up of two rounds. Probably in the first round, all parties will have their own candidates, but in the second round [when the top two candidates from the first round enter a run-off], we think Lula will have to make alliances with the PSDB, with PDT, and with parts of the PMDB, plus the traditional left, including the two Brazilian Communist Parties and at least one socialist party. This is an alliance of left socialists and democratic forces, going from left-centre to left. It includes all the people connected with the democratic movement during the resistance struggle against the dictatorship.

Bulletin: *What kind of platform is the alliance likely to put forward in the campaign?*

Weffort: This alliance represents on one side, an attempt to consolidate political democracy, and on the other, to resume economic development. From 1945 to 1980, we had nearly 7% growth a year, and even though we are a country with tremendous

social inequalities, that was a period of some relief, in the sense that the poorest sectors of the population had a certain degree of hope of new employment. Now we have a much worse situation from the point of view of social inequalities, and a situation in which there is no hope at all: since 1980, we have had 13 years of economic stagnation and inflation levels of 30% a month. The poor people of the country, 80% of the population, have no way to defend themselves against such high levels of inflation. The big entrepreneurs, the bankers and the big landowners, even the middle class and certain organised sectors of the working class, all have some chance of defending themselves against inflation, because at least they have saving accounts in the banks; but the big majority of Brazilians don't have any accounts at all.

So to fight against inflation, to stabilise the situation, and to prepare the country to resume development, is a way to attack the tremendous social disparities in the country, and to give a basis for the consolidation of political democracy.

Bulletin: *But surely even the right says they want to resume development. What is the difference between a left alliance proposal to resume economic development, and the policies that would be put forward by the right?*

Weffort: The PT is prepared to support a real democratisation of the sacrifices the country has to make to stabilise the financial situation. In the last 13 years, all sacrifice has been on the shoulders of the poorest majority of the country. We want the middle and upper classes to pay something, and we are convinced that with equal distribution of burdens, we will be able to stabilise and resume development.

The difference is not the diagnosis of inflation, or of the need for stabilisation and resumption of development; the point of difference between the left and the right is their social class perspective. A different conception of democracy lies behind the party's views of the process of development.

To resume development is a way of establishing the possibility of reducing social disparities, and of establishing the law as equal for everybody, and of consolidating democracy. We believe in democracy and we think we are all responsible for the current situation – including rich people. So, they have to contribute also. This view of democracy is really very simple, but in a country like Brazil, real economic and social policies for the country must be inspired by that perspective.

One important difference is that the right has been in power, and they haven't done much; they haven't attacked their own home. For example, one cause of inflation in Brazil is financial speculation; bankers don't lose with inflation! Or, for example, at least half of Brazilian entrepreneurs don't pay taxes to the state; tax evasion is far more common among the upper classes, because salaried people have no choice but to pay their taxes when they receive the salary. You should oblige entrepreneurs to pay taxes. It is impossible to talk about reducing public spending without raising public earnings through taxes. When you have such terrible poverty on one side, and such privilege on the other, in what sense can you talk about consolidating democracy?

Bulletin: Where will socialism fit into the PT's campaign?

Weffort: In this campaign, socialism is an ideological reference, but we are not making a campaign for socialism now. We should be very clear: we say that we are socialists, but we are not proposing socialism for Brazil. The PT was born to help the organisation of workers; and with the idea that workers are prepared to organise themselves, and to fight for a new type of society. This implies a connection of the party with socialism from the beginning. But this doesn't mean that in every possible historical conjuncture, we must fight for socialism. In the case of Brazil in the 1994 campaign, we will present ourselves as a party with a socialist ideology, but the governmental programme is not socialist. Rather, it is a democratic



Lula campaigning in 1989: will he win in 1994?

programme, trying basically to attain those two objectives I have already discussed: development and democracy. We think those two points could have a relation to socialism in the future, but it would be false to think that to fight for development and democracy in Brazil today is to fight for socialism. It's not. It could be a step for a more modern type of society, that could be in the future a way for a process of transformation in the sense of socialism.

Socialism is a point under discussion in the PT, and we have different views about what it means. Since the beginning of the party, we haven't accepted either the bureaucratic conception of socialism, nor social democratic socialism. Personally I would say that socialism is a kind of society in which labour movements, labour parties, are hegemonic. This doesn't mean that socialist society is not a class society, but that working classes are hegemonic. This also doesn't mean that socialism equals state ownership of the means of production; it doesn't mean, necessarily, the suppression of every kind of private property, or even the suppression of every kind of capitalist

private property. This means a situation in which a socialist movement, organising the workers, making broad alliances with other sectors of society, is able to direct the state so as to defend the general social interests, to subordinate private capitalist interests to the general interests of society.

This requires the creation of new institutions, this means a change in the working of direct democracy, the enrichment of representative democracy, and the arrival of democracy at places of work. But this is a personal view. Although it is one that a lot of other people in the PT would defend, you could also find other conceptions within the party.

But anyway, we don't face now a moment in which the path to this type of society is a clear prospect, at least for the next year. Our problem is to resume development; our basic problem is to get employment for people.

Bulletin: *If Lula is elected next year, what kinds of policies will he carry out?*

Weffort: Immediately, Lula would have to force half the bourgeoisie to pay taxes. Secondly, he would reschedule the internal debt of the state, as a way to make the financial situation more manageable; he should also take control of inflation, through measures like price controls, and through sectoral agreements between the state, capital and workers to control prices. He would also have to act against those involved in inflationary speculation – bankers, and big enterprises that engage in financial speculation rather than production.

And I would say Lula would also be prepared to redefine the use of public spending, because the problem is not that public spending is so big, but that it is misused, that it is used for private ends or privileges, or to protect certain corporatist sectors, including workers in corporatist sectors. These measures would gain the state immediate credibility in the country and the world, so as to attract new capital, new money.

Bulletin: *What about land reform?*

Weffort: Agrarian reform is an urgent need in the most backward regions of the country, and in those areas, the new government will have a process of agrarian reform. But for most of the modern agricultural sectors of the country, in which, paradoxically, we have had the development of big capitalist properties, it makes no sense to talk about agrarian reform. We should talk about unions, or the defense of workers' organisation, new conditions of labour, etc.

The idea that you could have immediate land reform across the whole country is more a matter for propaganda than for political reality. Agrarian reform is a process. You have not only to divide the land and settle the people, but to provide capital and technical assistance – it takes years. These are questions that should be dealt with by competent technical people in government.

The difference between a Lula government and any previous government in Brazil is that Lula's government will have no connection with landowners. In previous governments leaders have been landowners themselves or friends of landowners.

Bulletin: *How different are these proposals from social democracy in Western Europe or the United States?*

Weffort: Probably it's not so different. But I think if we could apply in Brazil certain democratic laws that are in the United States, this would be a terrific thing. Or, if you could collect 56% of the GNP in the form of taxes, and make a redistribution of this in the form of public service, as they do in Sweden – well, in Brazil you would need to make a social revolution.

The process of capitalist development in Brazil has been unable to integrate the majority of the people; the fact is that in Brazil you can talk of something like 50 million workers, in a country of 150 million. More than half the population lives below the level of absolute poverty. You should talk not only of unemployment, but of the underemployment of millions and millions

of people. To get employment for the people probably is a very simple objective, but in terms of the modernisation of a country like Brazil, really it would be a democratic revolution. So the meaning of these policies is not abstract; it depends on the country and the conditions in which they are made. In the case of Brazil, democracy is a revolution. Democratisation is a revolutionary process in Brazil.

Lula in the campaign of 1989 was extremely successful: he had 16% in the first round, and 47% in the second. This increase showed the PT's political competence, because it managed to win not only the opinion of leaders in the alliance, but the support of the masses in the allied parties in the second round.

The other problem is that of course you have to express social protests, criticism and demands during the campaign, but you have also to express to the population the

conviction that your party is prepared to govern, that your party has a programme for the people, not only for the party. This is not so easy as a political problem, because it could mean that some people in the party's following will not be so happy with the

directions given by the party leaders, because they would like much more; but they will have to accept the reality that they are not the owners of the country. Brazil is not only the PT, Brazil is the country of all Brazilians, and the new government will be a government of all Brazilians.

In every municipality we have controlled, we have had this problem, because of this dialectic between the formation of the political identity of the party – which means you are making criticisms, making your differences with the others clear, and then, when you arrive in the government, you are conscious that you have to govern all the city, all the state. You have to form the government, with opposition from other parties, of course, but not against other parties. You cannot make a government in a country like Brazil with the prospect of destabilisation; you have to



Bulletin:

Could you say something about how the PT approaches the election campaign?

Weffort: There is a major tactical problem for this kind of two-round campaign. In the first round, each party presents its own candidate, which means each party tries to make clear their differences from the others. In the second part, the candidates who enter the run-off try to make alliances. The tactical problem is that in the first part, you have to make your differences clear – without forgetting that in the second part, you will be obliged to make alliances with the same people with whom you have to show differences now. You have to show your differences with respect to possible future alliance partners without offending or attacking them.

The problem is not only one of conversations and alliances between leaders, but it is also the political meaning of the campaign in the first round for the masses.

make the new government with allies, and with people who will oppose the government, but not destabilise it. So this is part of the campaign from the beginning.

The third point of the campaign is that it is a mass campaign, not only a conversation of leaders or propaganda directed to activists. It is directed to the masses of people, which means the party should be prepared to simplify the basic proposals it has to offer, in symbols, in general ideas and slogans, and to find all possible avenues to talk, to explain politics to the people.

In Brazil, it is absolutely decisive that parties use the free time on television (allotted in proportion to the number of votes the party has in parliament). This is basic because the majority of the population is functionally illiterate;

the press reaches barely 5% of the population, and of course, PT doesn't have the least control of any big newspaper. But the party has complete control of the television time reserved for it by law during elections.

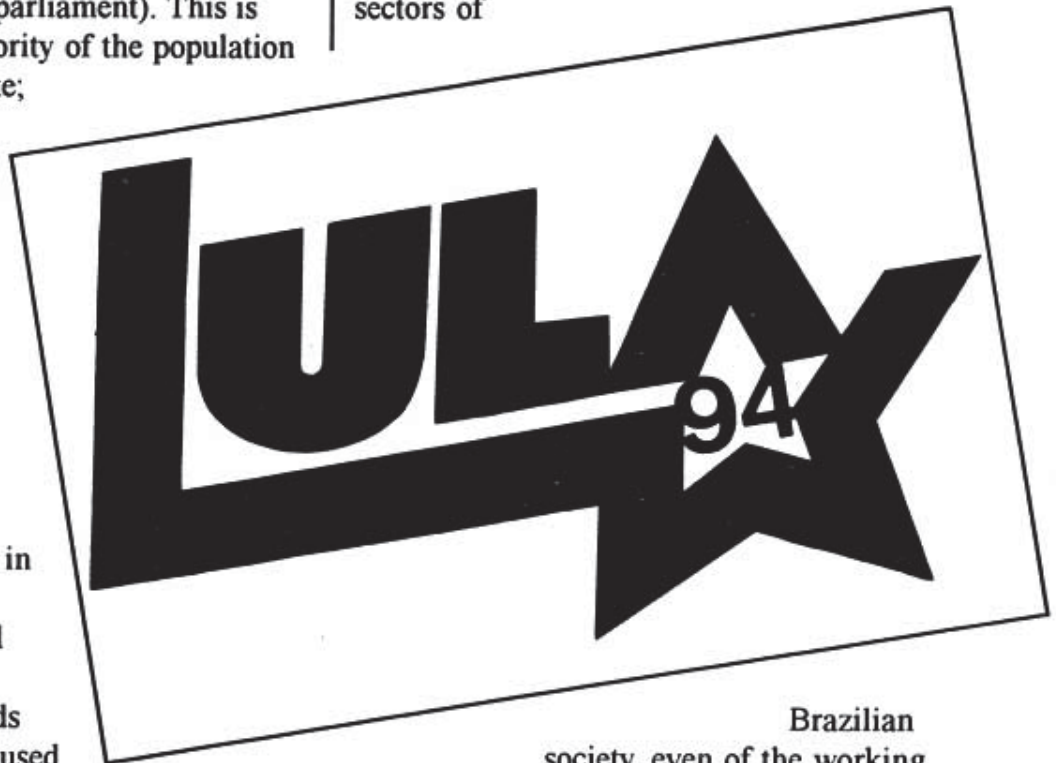
Besides television, in all our campaigns, we have used music based on popular Brazilian music, using new words for the campaign, and used symbols, like the red star of the PT. We also use videos, because a lot of people don't have televisions in their homes. Activists show the videos in public places – in streets, in public squares – and make discussions during the campaign.

Bulletin: *What ideological difficulties do you foresee in reaching the majority of Brazilians in the next election?*

Weffort: There are two main points. One is that in Brazil, there has been very important progress of left leadership, union organisation and left progressive parties; the

proof of this is the candidacy of Lula, who now has a larger following than the party itself. If the party has a following of 10 to 11% of the electorate now, Lula has a percentage nearer to 30%. We are making extraordinary progress, and I think that Lula has a real chance of winning.

But this will be a struggle. Brazilian society is very hierarchical, and retains a lot of the very conservative ideologies which have been hegemonic for decades. PT is a workers' party, an attempt to build workers' organisation from below; it has a kind of radical conception of democracy. But in addition, the main leader of PT is a worker. It is very hard for conservative sectors of



Brazilian society, even of the working class and the poor, to accept the idea that someone like them is prepared to govern the country. This is our fight, to show that we have a candidate that is equal to the people, and that because he is equal, he is prepared to govern the country.

This is a radical ideological struggle, because we are facing the conservative tradition of the Brazilian mentality, which tells workers that someone like them is unprepared to govern. So we will have, in 1994, a profound struggle for democracy and for change. This will not be like any other election. ☆