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**The Workers' Party and Democratization in Brazil**  
by Margaret Keck (Yale University Press, 1992)

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**Without Fear of Being Happy: Lula, the Workers' Party and Brazil**  
by Emir Sader and Ken Silverstein (Verso Press, 1991)

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*Reviewed by Gay Seidman\**



More than any other Third World country, Brazil seems to hold lessons for South Africans. Like South Africa, Brazil has experienced nearly a century of savage capitalist development, with severe inequalities as well as real potential

for economic growth; like South Africa, Brazil has experienced a lengthy transition from authoritarian rule.

Brazil also has a militant working-class movement, which has challenged elite control. In 1989, the Workers' Party candidate, a former metalworker known as 'Lula', came only six percentage points short of winning Brazil's first open presidential elections since 1960. Since it emerged after militant strikes in the early 1980s, the Workers' Party – the Partido dos Trabalhadores, or PT – has been the voice of poor and excluded Brazilians, refusing to follow the clientelist patterns of Brazil's 'politics-as-usual'.

Brazil's transition from authoritarian rule was

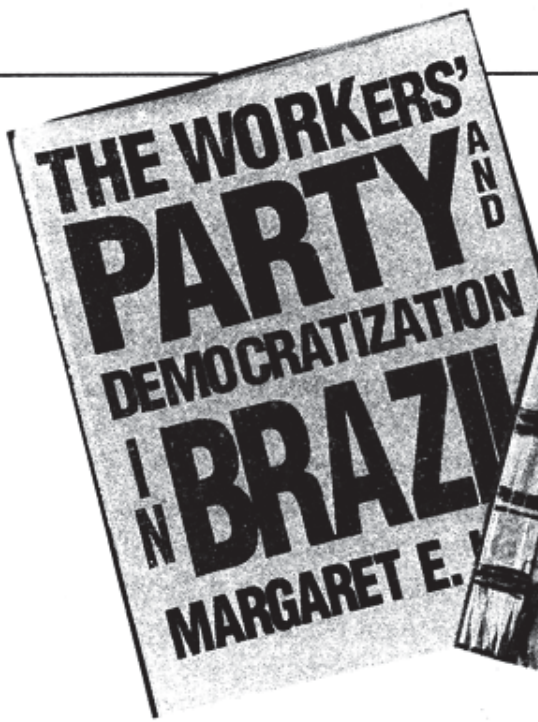
long and difficult, involving complex negotiations over constitutional principles, amnesty and other issues that will be familiar to South Africans. Unlike other left-leaning parties, PT refused to make compromises with the military who had ruled Brazil for 20 years – much as South Africa's mass democratic movement refused to participate in township councils.

At the time, PT's decision was unpopular: it was seen as spoiling the negotiations, and jeopardising the transition to democracy. Later, however, when former members of the military government – including president Fernando Collor de Mello, recently impeached for corruption – continued to play prominent roles in national politics, the party was widely seen as having more political integrity than others, and it received a great deal of popular credit for its refusal to trade its broader definition of democracy for short-term gain.

After the 1989 presidential campaign, one of Lula's aides described the reception Lula got around the country, where poor Brazilians flocked to show their support for a democratic socialist party. "In ten years," he said, "the small PT had arrived where political scientists and

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commentators could never have imagined: in the most distant villages, where half a dozen Brazilians had organised to fight for their rights and a more dignified life.”

Until now, however, there has been relatively little information about PT in English. These two books, both sympathetic to the party, show how the party has grown and changed over the thirteen years of its existence.

Emir Sader, a leading PT strategist, and Ken Silverstein, an American journalist, describe the party's growth from a small, relatively unimportant party in 1980, to a major national voice. They explain the party's appeal to Brazil's poor – to workers whose unions have faced repression; to peasants denied land or jobs; to city dwellers in inadequate housing, lacking urban services.

### **A different vision**

They show how Lula and his party offered Brazil a different vision, with democratic participation through popular councils, with labour rights and land reform, and with a rejection of international banks' austerity programmes, PT managed to attract widespread support from middle class as well as poor Brazilians. As the authors conclude, “The party's 1989 presidential campaign slogan, ‘Without fear of being happy’, expresses the audacity of a party which seeks to take power at the head of the huge majority

and show that, politically and ethically, the people have the right to happiness.”

Yet, although Sader and Silverstein's book is very readable, it is sometimes frustrating, because the authors seem reluctant to acknowledge that PT has not had a smooth path. Instead of telling readers about some of the difficult decisions the party has had to make, or about the debates over strategies that the party has gone through, they describe its appeal.

For South Africans hoping to learn from PT's experiences – its strategic choices and failures as well as victories – Margaret Keck's book will probably be much more useful. An American academic who has been close to PT since it was founded, Keck's account is both sympathetic and realistic.

### **A changing class constituency**

Keck describes the way PT has changed, from a party which South Africans might have considered ‘workerist’ – built mainly on a militant trade union base in Sao Paulo, Brazil's industrial heartland – to a party appealing to all those excluded from Brazil's capitalist system. Where it once spoke only for the small industrial working class, PT now speaks about creating a broader citizenship, which will offer all Brazilians the right to participate in decisions, and the right to basic social justice.

This does not mean that PT has abandoned the workers who provide its real constituency;

rather it acknowledges the diversity of interests that make up the broad "working class". Instead of viewing that class as fixed and unchanging, however, it now sees the working class as a constituency built through struggle, knitted together as people with different experiences learn how their interests are linked. So the PT has become the party of those who feel excluded – not only workers, but also blacks, women, peasants, and so on.

Along the way, PT has had to make choices. How does a party whose major resource is its ability to mobilise the poor in demonstrations, strikes, and so on, represent its constituency once it is in power? Like the ANC-COSATU-SACP alliance, PT brings together people from different local movements. PT leadership tries hard to prevent local movements from becoming a 'transmission belt': instead of party leaders dictating to the movements, PT tries to take its lead from movement activists.

"From the beginning," Keck writes, "the Workers' Party has been committed to change from below, of politics from the bottom up." During prolonged national negotiations over a new constitution – through the mid-1980s – PT found its activists became focused on the national assembly, away from the grassroots, and had to make a conscious decision to return to local movements.

### Power vs protest

But there are still problems: sometimes the logic of social movements, whose power tends to come from their ability to disrupt, conflicts with the logic of increasing political participation, within established institutions. PT has not resolved this problem, but its experiences certainly holds lessons. Since 1982, PT has experience running a number of municipalities.

As the party has never held Brazil's central government, PT mayors have had to make do with small budgets and unhelpful bureaucracies. Nevertheless, the party has found creative ways to deal with the problems facing Brazilian cities – with squatter camps, with inadequate schools and clinics, and high unemployment.

At the same time, however, the party had to learn how to create participatory democracy while working within political institutions that have reinforced elitist politics for decades. PT's experiences show just how difficult it can be to take power and design proactive policies, when your organisation and militants have been involved in protests, not policy-making.

### Many 'tendencies'

This problem is also reflected in the party's structure, which has allowed different factions, or 'tendencies', to offer different strategies and candidates for positions within the party. Different social movements and different political groupings within PT often disagree about the best way forward. Proportional representation for these different 'tendencies' has increased internal debate and democracy, but it has sometimes increased friction within the party; some activists believe it uses up valuable energy that should go to mobilising support for PT's broader vision.

PT began as a minority party, and never expected to be close to winning national power; indeed, its analysis of the transition saw the military, supported by the dominant classes, as a real threat to democratic elections. Its approach to elections reflects this history. PT views election campaigns as offering a chance to win real power, at local and national levels, but also as offering a moment when it is possible to discuss politics with large numbers of people.

The election campaign is partly about getting people to vote for you, PT says, but also a profound moment of education, where people can begin to think about what kind of political system they want and what kinds of leaders to choose. Keck writes, "Political struggle is not only a struggle for power within a well-defined arena and according to well-defined rules, but also a struggle over the shape of the arena and the nature of the rules themselves." PT, she says, has changed the shape of the Brazilian arena, and has managed to create a space in which workers and the poor can insist on being included as full citizens in the country's future. ☆