

Brasilien

Nine months of Lula's government

Von João Machado / 1. Januar 1970

After nine months in office, the government of Luis Inacio da Silva "Lula" has confirmed its contradictory and in many aspects even surprising character.

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The biggest surprises are an economic policy that displays great continuity with that of the previous government, the PT had opposed, and the assembly of a base of parliamentary and political support that incorporates almost all the existing left wing forces in the country. "In fact, on the right, only the parties that formed the base of the government of Fernando Henrique Cardoso (FHC), the Brazilian Social Democracy Party (PSDB) and the Liberal Front Party (PL) continue in formal opposition; nonetheless, they have been partners of the government in some of its more important initiatives, such as pensions reform. This does not denote involvement of the government in the general lines of its own proposal, which they have not opposed, simply because of opposition from the PT. On this question the government based opposition from sectors of the social movements and, at the parliamentary level, mainly the left of the PT and some of the other left parties.

On the other hand, the Lula government with the historical programme of the PT in the areas of international relations, agrarian reform and other sectors. There have been important changes in these areas from the policies of the previous government, but they face difficulties, given the more general economic and political choices made by the government so far.

An initial balance sheet of the PT

The great contradictions which even make it difficult to draw a considered balance sheet of the process, in any case, is important to say. Because of the weight that they have in the definition of the government's overall policy possibilities, it is best to start the assessment from the general political options and the economic policy which have been the most high in August and a bit in real income for workers and for society as a whole (all these facts are certified by different public statistics). Moreover, the combination of an increased primary fiscal surplus with high interest rates implies a significant transfer of wealth to the holders of financial assets, in other words the wealthier sectors of society. The income of the overall population has fallen and, to make matters worse, it is becoming still more concentrated. Finally, fiscal austerity imposes great restrictions on all government policies.

The negative consequences of the macroeconomic policy will be hard to overcome. The maintenance of the increased primary fiscal surplus is necessary for the entire term of president Lula, and compromises the capacity for public investment. The fall in the income of society inhibits private investment. Thus, even with a reduction of interest rates (which, given the fact in inflation, is part of the logic of the monetary policies followed and would not indicate, by itself, a change in economic policy), economic recovery will tend to be limited – and will always be threatened by the permanence of external vulnerability.

As a result basically of the economic policy adopted, especially the search to gain the "confidence" of the markets, pensions reform has resulted in a big increase in the government's expenditure on social services and the CFT, that is, social taxes, but it has not been decisive to Lula's victory. Inside the PT, and in particular its active social base, it led to great discontent. This led to partial alterations in the plan, that reduced its damage, but they were insufficient to change its character. "3

A new foreign policy

The most positive aspect of the government's orientation so far has been its foreign policy. Beyond opposing the US attack on Iraq and steps in the direction of establishing an independent foreign policy, there has been an attempt to construct South American unity, and also a sort of the so-called "developing" countries, opposed to the interests of the imperialist countries, as was seen at the World Trade Organization (WTO) conference at Cancun. Brazil is also opposing the US position on the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA). Although the negotiations on this are continuing, the government has sought to reduce their scope, saying that it could eventually accept an FTAA-like, from which subjects would be excluded that surpass the limits of trade (the regulation of government purchases and investments), and have demanded important concessions from the Americans, given the vulnerability of the country to external pressure and the existence of disputes inside the government. It is not clear what the outcome of the process will be. Thus, the proposal for a referendum made by the Continental Campaign Against the FTAA, with the objective of rejecting the FTAA in its entirety, retains a burning relevance.

In opposition to the policy of the defence of international relations that has been conducted by the Ministry of Finance (the relations with the IMF). There a conservative position prevails. This recently led to a paradoxical situation – when the Argentine president negotiated an agreement (which in part the pressures of the IMF, they enjoyed the support of other Latin American heads of State, and even the USA, but not Lula. The press has denigated that Kirchner is disatisfied with the extreme subservience of the Brazilian government at level, which seems very illeq. Lula has rejected certain that he has accepted the agreement.

In fact, it seems that a significant number of the more dubious decisions in economic policy have not been a result of IMF pressure. For example, there is currently a discussion on whether a new agreement with this institution is useful, and many sectors of the government have said that this would depend on having greater flexibility in the negotiation of credit. This is not the case of the more solid aspects of economic policy, paying for the lands redistributed in the framework of land reform with Agrarian Debt bonds. With the method currently used, this would be counted as an internal debt and would reduce the primary fiscal surplus). In this debate, Finance Minister Palocch has opposed any significant flexibilization, even if this would be accepted by the IMF. The inner group that decides Brazilian economic policy is, therefore, showing itself more orthodox and conservative than the IMF.

Land reform

The conception of economic policy has been a significant obstacle to agrarian reform. On this question, the Ministry of Agrarian Development* 4 has, since the early days of the government, established a constructive relationship with the rural social movements and has sought a broad dialogue with society.

A new conception of agrarian reform is being developed, as well as of family and cooperative agrarian, integrated with a project of change of the economy and society. Immediately this involves aid to the settlements of landless peasants carried out under the FHC government, so as to ensure urbanizing jobs and overcome productive degradation. Financing of the harvest for small producers, as well as the construction of alternatives that make the settlers economically viable are the first concrete results of this process. Moreover, the government has committed itself to urgently settle about 60.000 families who are squating. Finally, the Ministry has shown the determined resistance of the large estate owners, who are organizing itself. It favors immediate and firm action to punish those responsible and prevent them constituting a latifundist state in the Brazilian countryside.

All these policies, however, come up against the budgetary restrictions imposed by the economic policy that has been chosen. For example, without the funds to pay the latifundists "5 the commitment to settle 60.000 families could not be fulfilled. "5 This example, like others, shows once more the contradiction between social change and the maintenance of basic aspects of the economic model inherited from FHC.

Reform on GMOs

Another controversial question opposes the conception that prevails in the economic area and sectors of the government – the question of genetically modified organisms (GMOs). The more conservative sectors of the government, prominently the Ministry of Agriculture, linked to the big agricultural producers, have defended the use of these organisms (in opposition to the policies previously defended by the PT as a whole). The Ministry of the Environment, the Ministry of Rural Development, the environmentalist movement, the social movements in the countryside (especially the MST), the progressive sectors of the Catholic and Evangelical churches, the CUT (rural union federation) and the social PT are all opposed. The government has finally issued a Provisional Measure allowing the culture of genetically modified soy as to 2004, repeating a procedure already adopted in the early days of the government, when the marketing of the harvest of illegally planted genetically modified soya was authorized. This measure has helped discredit the government in the eyes of the progressive social movements. It is possible that the vote on this question in Congress will lead to a significant confrontation between the position of the government and that of sectors of the PT.

This initial period of government reveals a conflictual dynamic, both inside the government and in the relationship of the government to the social forces responsible for its election. The contradictions have become ever more clear. If the Lula government can in some cases be the product of progressive movements, as happened in the conference on the 25th anniversary of the 1964 coup, it can also be clearly opposed to these movements, as in the case of pensions reform and the dispute over GMOs. On other questions, such as agrarian reform, the government has had difficulties in fulfilling its commitments due to budgetary restrictions and conservative conceptions of economic policy and the rural social movements have thus made their demands more forceful.

Thus, at the centre of this crisis is the economic policy that maintains external vulnerability and imposes policies of adjustment governed by neoliberal logic. So far, it is this policy that has set the general tone of the government.

The social movements in a complex picture

In this situation, the social movements have been obliged to seriously modify their behaviour. The electoral defeat of neoliberalism, with the election of Lula, represented a victory for the trade union and popular movement, and renewed its possibilities of organization and mobilization. On the other hand, they continue and have deepened absolute isolation and have been obliged to modify their behaviour. The electoral defeat of neoliberalism, with the election of Lula, represented a victory for the trade union and popular movement, and renewed its possibilities of organization and mobilization. On the other hand, they continue and have deepened absolute isolation and have been obliged to modify their behaviour. The electoral defeat of neoliberalism, with the election of Lula, represented a victory for the trade union and popular movement, and renewed its possibilities of organization and mobilization. On the other hand, they continue and have deepened absolute isolation and have been obliged to modify their behaviour.

The recent establishment of the Central National Meeting by the CUT, the MST, the World March of Women, the UNE (students' union and other bodies) is an important step in this direction. It was created on the basis of an understanding that a broad and unified popular mobilization alone can guarantee the conquest of the following, most. Many of the participant movements had already worked together in the campaign against the FTAA – this meant they already had a critical vision of the economic policy of the Lula government. A campaign for jobs was defined as the main initial joint action, since this struggle has greater potential for mobilization at the moment in which the economy is in a crisis. There is a broad pattern, including agrarian reform, national sovereignty and the social role of the state.

There is, therefore, an important politicization of the social movements underway, having as its axis a redefinition of their role in relation to the labour force. To help develop this process in the direction of affirming the social movements as basic subjects in the conflict of orientation of society and its struggle has been the main task of the PT today. In fact, the unbridgeable opposition of basic aspects of the economic model inherited from FHC, and the need to only be modified by a strong social movement, defining an alternative set of policies.

A platform for change

The election of a broader popular protesting society with a programmatic alternative has therefore a central importance at this moment. Some elements of this platform could be:

1) Understanding that popular participation in political decision-making is a decisive element for the affirmation of a left government (particularly democratic). Some elements of this platform could be:

2) An alternative economic policy, given to the PT the fulfilment of the Guidelines of the Program for Government, approved at the 12th National Meeting of the PT, which took place in late 2001 in Recife).

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