

Lula for President: the heritage and the challenges for the democratic field

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FOR THE PAST SIX YEARS, DEMOCRACY IN BRAZIL HAS BEEN CONFRONTED with the fascism that has settled here along with serious political, economic, health, cultural, and social crises. Until September 2022, the COVID-19 pandemic had killed 685,677 people, proportionately one of the highest mortality rates on the planet (14th place), and the second in the Americas, with 3,214 million inhabitants, lagging behind only Peru¹.

Epidemiological analyses show that half of those deaths could have been avoided had the Federal Government adopted guidelines and measures based on scientific knowledge and acquired vaccines in a timely manner, since, during a pandemic, the time variable is a fundamental one².

This reveals the poor health management of the Bolsonaro administration, which should be characterized as silent, mistaken, corrupt, in which the purchase and distribution of vaccines only took place through a broad mobilization of society, including the support of the Legislative and Judiciary Powers. Without carrying out effective immunization campaigns over the period, vaccination coverage is below what Brazil has historically always had. Currently, only 55.7% of the population has taken the booster dose (third dose) of the COVID-19³ vaccine, which constitutes one of the immediate challenges for the control of the disease which, at the moment, already presents itself in the variant of the Omicron group of extremely high transmissibility, with an exponential increase in diagnoses and hospital admissions.

Lula, unjustly imprisoned for 580 days (from April 7, 2018 to November 8, 2019), won the elections on October 30, 2022, in spite of everything and everyone who struck democracy. President Bolsonaro questioned on several occasions the integrity of the electoral process, and the country's far-right continues to refuse to accept the results. Upon being elected, Lula expands his political power and emerges as one of the greatest political leaders of our time, on the one hand, acclaimed for having barred the continuity in power of one of the mainstays of the world's ultra-right and, on the other, for emerging as the redeemer of a country destroyed by fascism and by the return to the hunger map. One of his great challenges will be to unify the country, which is ideologically divided.

Bolsonarism, in turn, accumulated victories and managed to elect leaders to state governments and various positions in state and federal legislatures, showing that the far-right and the fascist ultra-right have grown organically within national politics.

The hope for changes that resume the foundations of the Federal Constitution of 1988 turns to Lula's third term in the Presidency of Brazil, after the most important and toughest electoral process in the history of Brazilian democracy, in which the people who live in the Northeast, the women, and the youth played an important role in choosing the country's future.

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After the proclamation of the results of the presidential elections on October 30, 2022, the most fanatical base of Bolsonaro's far-right took to the streets, blocking roads and creating vigils and vandalism in various locations across the country. A month after the end of the election, groups are still camped near military barracks and on roads in the states of the federation, in general where agribusiness prevails, in which Bolsonaro had the most votes. These facts constitute strong indications that the Brazilian far-right will try, as in other Latin American countries, to destabilize the democratic order and the conditions of governance for Lula, who will take office on January 1, 2023.

It can be said that Brazil is under the domination of intolerance and hatred. It is not a conservative ideology that defends its moral agenda, but maintains fidelity to democratic principles and usually respects democracy, its institutions, and those who think differently. It is a confrontation with democracy in a frank rehearsal for totalitarianism that praises authoritarianism, misogyny, homophobia, and worships genocide. One of the main foci of hatred is feminism, whose struggle displaces the role and participation of women in society. That's why they fight what, bizarrely, they decided to call 'gender ideology', a term emptied of meaning, but with power in generating moral panic, especially in Pentecostal religious communities and in ordinary people fed by untrue messages, disseminated daily by WhatsApp and other social networks.

In the coming months and years, Bolsonaro will probably try to maintain himself in the leadership of the ultra-right with the accumulated political capital; for that, he will choose the path of chaos that gives him greater visibility. However, the crimes he committed in the exercise of his term must be investigated and as the former president, go to trial. The democratic field must be tireless in demanding that these measures be adopted, for the crimes to be investigated and punished.

The elections took place under a sea of corruption, purchase of votes by the government, as well as the use of resources and the public machine, which is certainly the cause of the small difference in votes between the two candidates. Abusing social media, once again the ultra-right spread absurd fake news to support the parallel reality that underlies fanaticism and the deconstruction of politics as a practice of debates about the common interests of society.

The progressive, popular, and democratic field, highly mobilized in the electoral process, outlines its movements to restructure the country. Its first call is for the creation of a powerful atmosphere for Lula's inauguration with the 'symbolic takeover of Brasília' by the democratic-popular forces. In addition to caravans, proposals and debates are circulating, pointing to the need to move towards something more organic, oriented, cohesive, whose symbolism of the 'taking of Brasília' triggers a permanent social engagement that is consciously up to the challenges to be faced from then on.

Lula was elected based on a broad alliance of democrats of different political hues. In this process, which also chose a new federal parliament and for the states, the emphasis should be given to the social movements that elected important popular leaders, coming from the Homeless Workers Movement (MTST), the Landless Workers Movement (MST), the Black, Indigenous, and LGBTQIA+ Movements, occupying several seats in federal and state parliamentary houses. However, as a whole, the left and center-left forces did not numerically conquer a federal bench with a sufficient majority to reassure and guarantee Lula's governability.

The movement that Lula and his allies must operate with the necessary mastery to guarantee governability is part of the virtuous routine of politics. Government comes and goes, successive legislatures, and the country continues with a set of parties with no ideological base that adds a significant volume of parliamentarians who lean to one side or the other according to individual interests and meeting their demands, not always painless to the government. This

group known as the *'centrão'* ('the big center') was in Bolsonaro's political base, but has once also supported popular governments with high political cost negotiations for the Workers' Party (PT), including the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff, in 2016. The huge and persistent mediatic campaign to destroy Lula and the PT, put into practice over time, adds to the erosion of those relationships, having an important responsibility – though not exclusively – for the rejection of the party and Lula himself, for the anti-PT and anti-Lula feelings prevailing in Brazil.

In the context of a society divided and flooded by hatred, Lula's great task will be to rebuild the country, democracy, unity, and hope, while implementing social policies that reduce the enormous inherited inequalities, particularly the hunger that today reaches 33 million Brazilians.

There is great expectation regarding the strengthening of the health sector and the Unified Health System (SUS), which gained visibility and certain popular appreciation in the pandemic, but which, at the same time, is a sector in strong dispute with the private market. The invitation to the leaders of the National Health Council and the Brazilian Center for Health Studies (CEBES) to compose the government's Transition Commission in the field of health signals the role that organizations and entities of collective health and the Health Reform Movement (MRS) can play in the future government as actors with the capacity and power to influence the direction of health. However, far from conquering hegemony in the Transition Commission, in which the private sector is also housed and, under the spotlight of the mainstream media, insinuates itself to guarantee space for its interests, seeking a central role in the health policies of the new government.

The set of priority guidelines for health has been the subject of debate on the national scene; and, for the MRS, some stand out as they are considered structuring for the sector. Consistent with the concept of the social determination of health, which is the foundation for Latin American collective health thinking and social medicine, in the foreground there should be the defense of a fairer and more inclusive national development project, focused on reducing regional, racial, gender, and social class inequalities. This includes, in addition to the set of universal social policies, all feminist and anti-racist struggles, in defense of native peoples, the LGBTQIA+ population and anti-capacitist movements, and the anti-asylum struggle.

The recomposition of the health budget is an urgent and necessary measure to allow the survival, expansion and qualification of the SUS, which is chronically underfunded, but which, in the last four years, has accumulated a real loss of R\$ 37 billion⁴. To become a universal and quality system, the SUS, as mandated by the Constitution, requires that at least 6% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) be invested in health. These resources are essential for consolidating health care networks capable of operating comprehensive care and care through the provision of services of different complexities, ordered by Primary Care, which, in turn, needs to have greater investments.

For a long time, the country has been warned about the importance of investing in the Health Economic and Industrial Complex, producing self-sufficiency, safety and health autonomy, that is, reducing the degree of external dependence on inputs and technologies. The tragic experience of the lack of basic supplies during the pandemic cannot be repeated. It is important to remember that the health sector can effectively contribute to economic growth and social development through incentives that will also focus on the creation of high-quality jobs.

Another strategic topic for the SUS is the issue of the workforce, and the debate includes the challenge of creating public careers for its workers. No less important is the strengthening of participatory management, participation, and social control mechanisms provided for in the sector's legislation and developed in the practice of SUS institutions, which accumulate enormous experience in improving the management of the system.

In this complex panorama, in which tensions and interests are becoming explicit, it is increasingly clear that, for the Brazilian left, it remains to rebuild its social bases with the expansion of the political consciousness of the people, guiding the appreciation of the principles of social solidarity and democracy. This gigantic task involves the challenge of including all territories in networks of local committees that not only inform and train citizens, but also mobilize and organize this base. The broad alliance of democrats that guaranteed Lula's victory brings with it the difficulties of ensuring that popular interests are fully met if the people are not on the streets exercising their right to organize and mobilize to claim and guarantee their rights. For that, some initiatives seem urgent, such as establishing a channel of correct information about government actions and the political situation, aiming to increase the base organization of civil society and keep it mobilized and prepared to face the reaction of the Brazilian far-right. Such an urgent task suggests the creation of several networks with high capillarity and dynamism, involving social leaders, the militant base, and sympathizing sectors of progressive theses throughout the national territory, overcoming the perplexity and fear that fascism tries to spread in society.

Shortly after the election results, Lula was occupying the conventional media in a positive way, but, after the first moment of favorable articles, the specter of the market already insinuates and confronts the unavoidable electoral commitments of reducing social inequalities and eliminating hunger in the country. Even the last-minute supporters, who did not get any votes, provoke the elected government with criticisms and 'warnings' extracted from neoliberal economics manuals contextualized in fiscal austerity and the reduction of public spending. However, several groups and fronts that support Lula warn that the inauguration is a key moment for the dissemination of information that guides and mobilizes this social base in order to guarantee governability and that the winning project is, in fact, put into practice. Converging with these analyses, it is necessary to point out that, in addition to this mobilization and confrontations, it is essential to think of more organic and better oriented strategies, whose symbolism of the 'taking of Brasília' is the starting point for social engagement that is up to par, consciously, of the challenges that we will face in the next four years.

Collaborators

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