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Luiza takes São Paulo

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Dear Peter,

São Paulo is still blinking its eyes in surprise at the results of the municipal elections of November 15. If everything proceeds as it should in a democracy, the largest city in Latin America will now be governed by what was considered a triple impossibility: a woman, a Northeasterner, and a socialist representing one of the principal parties of opposition to President José Sarney and the "New Republic".

Two weeks before the election, not even Luiza Erundina's own party, the PT (Partido dos Trabalhadores - Worker's Party), believed her victory possible. Luiza was in third place, well behind candidate João Leiva of the PMDB and front-runner Paulo Maluf of the PDS.* Although Luiza's campaign rhetoric still referred to victory, the most that the PT hoped for was the election of a reasonable number of city councilmen. In the final week of the campaign, while "petistas" and the city watched open-mouthed, Luiza's campaign began to grow irresistibly in the polls, passing first Leiva and closing in on Maluf, who was irrevocably dislodged from his first-place position only on election day itself. Out of a field of 14 candidates (six of whom received significant expressions of votes), Luiza Erundina was elected mayor of São Paulo by nearly 30% of the votes, with a reasonable margin of 4.7% in front of Maluf.

In the days following the election paulistanas seem to be walking with butterflies in their stomachs. There is a charge in the city that is rare to feel in these days of tired disillusionment with government and the seemingly uncontrollable rise of inflation. On the buses, in the streetcorner bars and luncheonettes, in the chattering encounters of housewives, all one hears is talk of Luiza and what her victory will or won't mean for São Paulo. Responses range from the exaggerated declaration that the victory was a catastrophe for São Paulo and Brazil, to the naive expectation that now the city's problems will be miraculously resolved. Two days following the election, when the results of the official vote-count were beginning to be released, I arrived at the door of my apartment building to encounter a cluster of senhoras from the neighborhood. Knowing I had been closely accompanying Luiza's campaign, they gathered around me to request the latest news. Most of them eagerly assured me that they had voted for Luiza, as they chattered their enthusiasm and their doubts:

"Who knows, maybe now things will change. All I know is that they can't get much worse."

"Now we'll see if the PT is really different from the other parties. Those politicians out there are all the same. But this year I thought, the PT is new, it

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hasn't had time to be corrupted. They have an ideal. Now we'll see if they do things any differently when they're in the government."

"Yes, but it's not going to be easy. The politicians and the businesses are going to do everything possible to give Luiza a hard time. Just think - if her government is a success, then Lula**could be elected president! Do you think they are going to let that happen?"

"I don't know if it is right to have a woman as mayor of São Paulo. This city is too complicated for a woman to govern."

"Ai, Dona Maria, but we have to start somewhere. It's the men who are responsible for this mess in Brasil. It's time to give a woman a chance."

"All I know is that we have to begin all our prayers asking God to help Luiza run her government."

In the chatter of these lower middle class housewives one can hear some of the reasons for Luiza's surprise victory. Frustrated and skeptical in the face of uncontrollable inflation, governmental posturing, frequent corruption scandals and widespread strikes, the people opted for the new, the politically untested, and the "idealistic" (petistas would say "ideologically coherent") force symbolized by the PT. They voted against the forces that be and for a vaguely articulated "change". It would be wrong to think that a majority of Luiza's electors voted for socialism. But the choice of the PT as their expression of opposition demonstrates the singular place this young, emergent party has established for itself in its nine years on the Brazilian political scene.

What has most impressed me in these moments of after-election emotion is the psychological reversal involved in Luiza's victory. One week before the election voters were prepared to vote for Maluf with the cynical justification that "rouba e deixa roubar" (he robs and lets rob). Why did they at the last moment switch their vote to the symbol not only of opposition to the present government, but also of popular organization, ethical coherence, and an inversion of government priorities? In an electoral process marked by popular cynicism, distrust, and blanket rejection of "all those politicians out there", the vote for Luiza was an unexpected, and perhaps fragile, affirmation of the possibility of change and of an ethical approach to political practice.***What I mean by "ethical" will hopefully become clear as one continues reading.

The campaign in the Zona Leste

More than in other regions of the city, this psychological reversal was strikingly evident in the poorer Eastern Zone of São Paulo, where I accompanied the campaign and lent a hand here and there. The "Zona Leste", as this region is known, traditionally decides elections in São Paulo, usually because its vast population of poor and less-educated workers is highly susceptible to the campaign promises of the Brazilian populist electoral tradition. Politicians tend to capitalize on the social

* PMDB - Party of Brazilian Democratic Movement. The PMDB currently controls federal government and a majority of state governments. PDS - Social Democratic Party. The remains of ARENA, party of the military government.

**"Lula" is Luis Ignácio de Silva, the popular labor leader who will be the presidential candidate of the PT in the scheduled elections of November, 1989.

*** I don't mean to say that only Luiza and the PT are "ethical" in their political orientation. I am commenting rather on the social phenomenon of the switch of votes from Maluf to Luiza. For the people, at that moment, Luiza symbolized the possibility of an ethical inversion of government priorities, in a political scene perceived of as corrupt, opportunistic, and supportive of privileged interests. Her symbolic force has a weight of its own, regardless of whether or not one agrees that her political principles are indeed ethical.

problems of the region, such as lack of housing, health care, schools, transportation, asphalt and sewage facilities to serve the constantly expanding population of work-seeking migrants from the northeast and center of Brazil. Voters in this region tend to vote with their emotions and their immediate concerns, rather than political or ideological calculations. For this reason, looking at what candidates the Zona Leste has helped usher into power gives an insight into the cultural roots and the emotional currents behind the dry numbers of the elections. In this newsletter I don't intend to do a political analysis of the reasons for Luiza's victory, but rather a social phenomenology of the popular attitudes involved in that victory, from the point of view of the poorer population of the Zona Leste.

The Zona Leste has not always elected candidates committed to addressing the problems of the region. In the mayoral election of 1985 it was the Zona Leste that elected the eccentric and authoritarian right-wing candidate, Jânio Quadros, defeating the candidate of the progressive center, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, who had the support of a majority of the city's middle class. Jânio promised to bring order and morality to the city, campaigning on the slogan "autoridade, trabalho, e austeridade". His symbol since his start in politics in the 1950's* has been that of a broom, promising to sweep clean the country's disorder. In a region beset by crime, unemployment and social disorganization, the promise of work and authority stuck, and the Zona Leste voted massively for Jânio, deciding a close race. In the two years of Jânio's administration it has become clear that "autoridade" means a police force given to indiscriminate violence against the poorer population, and "trabalho" means huge projects to beautify the center and wealthy neighborhoods of the city. But despite these easily unveiled contradictions, Jânio still possesses a certain mystique in the Zona Leste. The figure of the crazy old man who spends his days drinking pinga, but doesn't let anyone try telling him what to do, has a fascination that goes back to the rural reign of the colonels, deep in the authoritarian tradition in Brazil. Jânio may very well be a viable candidate for president in 1989, heading the coalition of the right to defeat the rise of Lula, who after this year's ascension of the PT has begun to be seen as a serious threat.**

"Malandragem": the return of Maluf

This year the Zona Leste was no less decisive in deciding the outcome of the elections. The difference was that one saw a zig-zag of popular support between various candidates. A week before the elections it seemed decided that the Zona Leste would once more succumb to the populism of the right and sweep Paulo Maluf into power. Maluf is an old-timer on the Brazilian political scene. He was mayor of São Paulo in 1970 and state governor in the early 1980's, in both cases occupying positions of trust for the military government. In 1985 he was the candidate of the military against Tancredo Neves in the electoral college that would elect the country's first civilian government in 20 years. Maluf was defeated due to the swelling of political and popular support for the figure of Tancredo, who had become

* Jânio Quadros was governor of São Paulo in the 1950's and president of Brazil in 1960, renouncing unexpectedly and passing the presidency to João Goulart, later deposed by the military coup of 1964.

** In addition to the mayorship of São Paulo, the PT won unexpectedly in two other state capitals and in 37 cities around the country, including the highly important industrial cities surrounding São Paulo. Since in 1985 it won in only 3 cities, this is a significant jump. In several other capitals, such as Rio, Goiânia, and Belo Horizonte, the PT remained a close second. In polarization of the national vote, 11 state capitals were won by parties of the left, 10 by parties of the right, and the centrist PMDB, which had won 21 governorships in 1986, remained with only 4.

the symbol of the country's rejection of military rule and hopes for democracy.* After that defeat Maluf stayed out of politics for several years, tending to lucrative private business interests.

Like Jânio Quadros, the figure of Maluf has a certain mystique. Although his administrations, like those of Jânio, were marked by police violence, projects to benefit the privileged and huge sums spent on personal propaganda, he has managed to maintain the image of the man who gets things done (for example, builds houses and opens schools, although their quality can and has been severely questioned). The several shady deals involved in his administrations have not tainted that image. While mayor, he used city money to buy automobiles for all of the soccer players in the victorious world cup of 1970. As governor he bought out a failing oil company, paying an exorbitant price, when the company would have been automatically assumed by the state for free within two years. At this point no one challenges the accusation that he is a crook. Maluf himself prefers to change the subject rather than re-opening the can of worms by denying its existence. But this history did not deter a large part of the population from their intention of voting in him. As another saying goes, "rouba mas faz" (he robs, but he gets things done.) For this reason many in the Zona Leste were willing to see him return, especially given their dissatisfaction with the current government of the PMDB. Maluf's mystique could be seen in the billboards around the city, on which were written apocalyptically, "MALUF IS COMING" or "MALUF WILL RETURN". He had turned into God descending from the sky to set things right.

It is interesting that in some ways the attraction of Maluf is the opposite of that of Jânio. While Jânio appeals to a traditional hard-nosed morality, as juxtaposed to social disorder, Maluf appeals to the force of the malandro in Brazilian culture, the maliciously free character who goes by shady side channels to reach his goals. The statement "rouba mas faz" has cultural weight. Brazilians will willingly tell you that "tudo brasileiro rouba" - everyone robs. If "the system" is unreliable, disorganized, and seemingly set up to screw you over, than various illegalities, from cutting in lines to supermarket thefts to street swindling deals, have a double aspect of practicality and delicious vengeance. This is the famous "jeitinho brasileiro", the Brazilian "little way" of getting by when things get tight. That doesn't mean Brazilians don't feel a bit ashamed of this and wish things would be different. But at this moment of general disillusionment, the "jeitinho brasileiro", as symbolized by the malandragem of Maluf, may seem a better option than continuing the way things are.

Efficiency: the rise of João Leiva

Although Maluf started the electoral race way ahead of all of the other candidates (due largely to the recognition of his name), he was severely challenged midway through the campaign by an unknown, João Leiva of the PMDB. Leiva was secretary of public works in the state government and was patronized by the governor, Orestes Quéricia, who needed a victory in São Paulo to support his own presidential

* Tancredo Neves died suddenly shortly after taking office, leaving his vice, current President José Sarney, to take his place.



ambitions. Like Maluf, Leiva had huge amounts of money to spend on his campaign, which went mostly to covering walls in the periferia of the Zona Leste with his name and to sophisticated programming on the daily hour of free television propaganda divided between the city's 14 mayoral candidates. Leiva's attraction was very different from that of Maluf. While Maluf emphasized his "experience", Leiva reinforced the fact that he was "new blood"; since he had never been elected to an public post, he would be different from "those politicians". He presented himself as a dynamic and competent administrator, who by means of a vast project of public works could solve the problems of São Paulo. Capitalizing on his experience as secretary of public works, he adopted as his campaign slogan "mãos a obra" (hands to work), appearing in shirtsleeves at construction sites, directing progress, conferring data, conversing with workers. He projected an image of sincerity, directness, energy and competence, together with the easy familiarity of a "man of the people". Unlike Maluf, one could say of him "this guy is serious". The most striking aspect of his television propaganda was his filmed visits to nearly every neighborhood in the city, discussing in detail the region's problems and proposing concrete, practical solutions in each case. He promised to alleviate traffic problems by building a tunnel in one location, in another set up bus corridors, in another build a hospital, in another develop a recreational area. Every area of the city had its own particular remedy. In the initial stage of the campaign this strategy saw fast results. Leiva began to climb in the polls, managing to tie with Maluf a month before the election. Although Brazilians identify with the malandro, they are extremely impressed with efficiency, due of course to the general lack of it.

I noticed this shift toward Leiva in my weekend visits to the periferia (poor outer edges of the city), where I work with favela children and church youth groups. Children, especially those raised in the street freedom of poor neighborhoods, enter into the campaign spirit as if they were going to a party. They have more enthusiasm than loyalty - when I arrived with campaign stickers of Luiza they plastered themselves with the red star of the PT. But when Leiva's campaign car passed in the street they tore out running behind, receiving stickers and flyers of Leiva that they maliciously tried to insert in my pockets and knapsack. The election was a game to them, a fact exploited by many candidates who use children to pass out pamphlets.

In my discussions with the kids it was possible to see reflections of their parents' attitudes, as well as their own preferences. Because of the kids' daily exposure to the television propaganda, the candidates had turned into tangible characters for them. They invented contests in singing campaign jingles as they played in the streets. About a month before the elections, as part of a discussion of the rights of children, I mobilized the kids to write to the principal candidates, asking them to consider the needs of children in the periferia. The kids went to the task with self-importance and enthusiasm. Their letters reflect the difficulties of the region:

"Dear Maluf," wrote Fernando, "I would like you to do these requests: don't arrest kids that are in the streets asking for things. Build day-cares, hospitals, houses, health posts, and schools. Maluf, if by chance you win, don't forget us because we are counting on you. . . São Paulo has many children who are hungry, sick people with headaches. And also better jobs, salary raises for our parents. Our parents pay rent and taxes, for this help us."

"Dear Leiva," wrote Luciano, "we children want you to give: better jobs, houses for the homeless, better day-care, schools, hospitals, better sewage, more police, food for the schools. Leiva, if you want our vote please help us by giving us these necessities."

"Dear Luiza," wrote Julia, "We are children of Jardim Veronia. We would like to gain many things from you. We would like many churches, day-cares, schools, toys for the children. We want sports courts in the schools. We want more food for our parents, and more jobs. I want you to think of the children of Brazil."

When we discussed which of the candidates they thought would do what they promised for the periferia, Maluf was the first one to be booed. For children, a reputed thief has little charm, and they were probably reflecting a growing skepticism about Maluf that was beginning to be heard, now that Leiva was an attractive alternative. "Maluf again? pelo amor de Deus, these people never learn!" commented the housewives with a click of the tongue. On the other hand, Leiva's extravagant promises were absorbed uncritically. "Maluf no, but Leiva will do what he promised," a group of little girls assured me earnestly, the mother of one of which was working in Leiva's campaign. For the moment at least, the folks of the favela seemed more impressed by Leiva's seriousness than by Maluf's experience. About Luiza they as of yet had little to say, except for a few timid questions about why I was supporting her. "My father says Luiza ain't got nothing," contested one boy. "And what's a woman going to do as mayor of São Paulo?"

What hurt Leiva in the end was his association with Governor Quércia, who was in turn associated with President Sarney (they are both of the PMDB) and the current economic crisis. Quércia is a rather smooth dealer with lightly disguised presidential ambitions, who has in the past year spent huge amounts of money on personal propaganda. The problem is that by now paulistanos are rather cynical about his propaganda, because the marvels described on television of state projects for street children, for school improvement, for roads and other public works are so difficult to see in real life. To intensify the general incredulity, Quércia made a serious tactical error midway through the campaign by choosing to repress with force a demonstration of professors, students and functionaries of the University of São Paulo, who had been on strike for several months. Rather than negotiate, Quércia called on the military police, who let loose tear gas, calvary and clubs, wounding nine. The scenes of violence were reproduced on the television space of the PT and other parties of the left, vividly destroying the clean image of the governor and his protégé, Leiva.

At this point, three weeks from election day, voters were beginning to notice that Leiva was really making a lot of promises. The opposition candidates came down hard, declaring that in three weeks of television programming Leiva had promised away 50 years of the city budget. Besides this, his campaign suffered from central contradictions. If he really intended to give priority to the periferia, why was he promising to build sports complexes and traffic tunnels in the wealthy sections of town? By trying to be all things to all people, Leiva dodged the ethical question of administration of priorities in a city of limited resources. All of these factors called into question whether he was indeed "serious". Leiva found himself tossed into the throw-all category of discredited politicians, and began falling in the polls. Maluf recuperated his strong lead and began to sing victory. Eight days before the election, Maluf had 30% in the polls, Leiva 19%, and Luiza was way behind at 14%. The number of undecided, which remained high throughout the campaign, was tied for second at 19%.

The final week: violence and possibility

What happened in the final week of the campaign to produce so radical a turnabout? Workers on Luiza's campaign staff claim that they felt a surge of support for Luiza beginning on November 6, nine days before the election. On that day the PT held its final major rally in the center of the city, gathering 60,000 according to



Luiza addresses women of the periferia at a rally of the health movement of the Zona Leste

its calculations, and 15,000 according to the police. At that time one of the other candidates of the left, Airtton Soares of the PDT (Democratic Labor Party), withdrew in support of Luiza. Leiva continued to fall and Luiza began to close the gap.

On November 9, six days before the election, a combination of circumstance whizzed the ball in Luiza's direction. That day, three workers were killed by government troops, and many others wounded, when the army was called in to squash a strike of metal-workers in Volta Redonda, an industrial town in the neighboring state of Rio de Janeiro. The same day, the media released several polls reporting that Luiza had tied or passed Leiva. Two things happened simultaneously. Voters got a sudden infusion of anger and repulsion against the "powers that be", and it became suddenly possible that Luiza could win. Progressively-oriented middle class voters who had planned to vote in Leiva to defeat Maluf (the so called "voto útil" - useful vote) suddenly saw the situation changed and rallied behind Luiza. And in the working class neighborhoods of the periferia, there was a virtual explosion of support for Luiza. Now that it was possible for Luiza to win, Maluf began to lose his attraction. In the weekend before the election he fell steadily in the polls. On the morning of election day the papers reported that the two were virtually tied, with Maluf maintaining a slight technical lead. By the end of the day exit polls were reporting that the victory would go to Luiza.

Luiza Erundina: a woman from the "bases"

To begin to understand what happened, one has to know more about Luiza Erundina and the PT. Erundina is an unmarried, middle aged woman, short and stocky, simple in dress and appearance, but full of fight and energy. She is a "nordestina", meaning that she was born in Paraíba, one of the poor states of the Northeast from which tens of thousands of people migrate to São Paulo every year. These are already two points against her electorally. "Nordestinos" are traditionally the butt of jokes for their stereotyped "hickish" ways in the big city. Limited by lack of economic and educational resources, they generally don't make it into the upper echelons of power. And an unmarried woman of Luiza's age and appearance is still highly suspect in this macho culture.

Because of these two "probleminhas", a good part of the leadership of the PT was against launching Luiza as candidate. And there were other difficulties. While Luiza has had an impressive performance as city councilwoman and state representative of the PT, she was considered too radical a figure to woo middle class voters, due to her combative history as an activist in the favela and land invasion movements, and in the strikes of public servants. The party leadership preferred the more moderate, church-related figure of Plinio de Arrudo Sampaio, one of the party's constitutional delegates. But Luiza had strong support among what is known here as the "bases" of the PT - the grass roots, local leaders in the party and the popular movements. These "militants", or activists, considered Luiza a stronger figure to mobilize the popular vote in the poorer regions and thus fortify the social movements in those areas.* They also approved the fact that Luiza was not afraid to talk about socialism, unlike many in the party's leadership. In a closely contested internal primary, Luiza received more votes than Plinio and became the party's candidate. Because of the difficulties described above, many in the party considered Luiza's campaign lost before it started. To their surprise, it was just those factors considered prejudicial that helped Luiza in the last minute wild accumulation of votes. The fact that she was a "nordestina" gave the heavy concentration of Northeasterners in the poor regions someone to identify with. The fact that she was a woman helped to emphasize her difference from "those politicians". And her long history in the popular movements of the Zona Leste gave the people in those movements a campaigning exuberance that became contagious in the tumultuous final days.

The PT and the rise of the new left

But these factors alone would not have given Luiza the victory without her association with the PT. The PT is a young party, born in 1979 with the wave of combative strikes that marked the weakening of the military regime. Luiza was one of the founders of the party, together with a diverse group of union leaders, church activists, popular organizers, intellectuals and dissidents from other political groups. They began to articulate the need for a "new left", different in structure and method from the various Communist parties (two of which are legalized at the present.) In stead of the usual centralized, authoritarian regimen, the PT proposed a radically democratic participatory structure. Instead of decisions made from above, the PT proposed wide dialogue on all levels of the party. Instead of striving to control (or "coopt") the social movements, the PT proposed to stimulate the autonomous organization of those movements, as part of the organic growth of popular participation and a more critical consciousness of society. And instead of importing foreign socialist models, the PT determined to base its analysis and proposals on Brazilian reality. In my next newsletter I will explore in more depth the relevance and the tensions involved in the new left. But this should give you a basic indication of the party's orientation.

But while a transformed political structure might sell the PT to its militants, it would not do so to the majority of the population. What made the PT a reference to voters was the consistency in its political posturing that the party has shown in its nine-year history. In keeping with its basic banners of increased participation of the workers and the poorer population, and a re-orientation of government priorities in their direction, the PT has taken several historically unpopular

* "Popular movements" in the areas of health, housing, education, transportation, sanitation, etc., flourish in the periferia of the Zona Leste. Often having as their nucleus the "base communities" of the Catholic church, they consist of neighborhood and regional groups of residents that organize themselves to pressure the government to meet the basic needs of their communities.

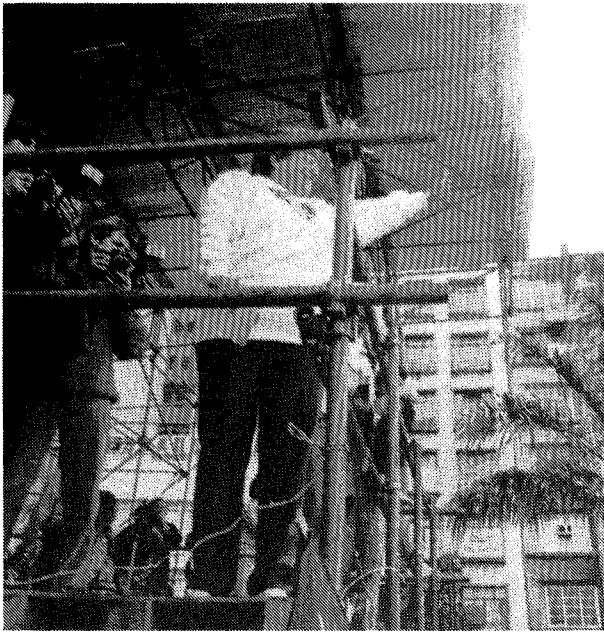
positions that in the current crisis are rendering dividends. When the 1985 popular campaign for direct elections, which mobilized the entire spectrum of the center-left, was "betrayed" by a top-level negotiation that decided an electoral college would be more "apt" for the transition to democracy than direct vote, the PT refused to participate. The party was criticized at the time for political infantilism, but can now gain the political credit of being "the only party that did not elect Sarney". In 1986 the PT denounced the extremely popular Plano Cruzado, a wage and price freeze to stabilize inflation, as economic demagoguery, which in fact it proved to be in its disastrous final stage. During the constitutional process its delegates were strong, visible defenders of the inclusion of labor reforms and other social benefits. And close to home, petistas are a constant force in the social movements, not just appearing at election time like "those politicians". In short, in nine years the PT has managed to transform its image from that of a band of radicals to that of a cohesive national articulation with a solid accumulation of social reference. So much so that João Mellão, candidate of the conservative PL (Liberal Party), complimented the PT as being the only "serious" party in the country. "The PT owes its success in these elections to its ideological coherence, something no other political party in the country has been able to achieve."

All of this history had a certain weight in people's minds when they decided to express their opposition by way of the PT. In the election commentary, much has been made of the aspect of rejection in Luiza's victory, as if to say, "it's not that they like the PT, it's that they can't stand the rest of us." But rejection can be expressed in other ways, such as the movement to "vote null" as a blanket protest against the system in general. The emphasis on rejection misses the positive side of a vote for Luiza, a side of affirmation for what she and the PT have grown to symbolize. Those voting for Luiza did not necessarily agree with the positions of the PT as described above. But they were impressed by the fact that the PT had stayed firm throughout those years, maintaining a consistent political stance based in reasonably coherent ethical* principles. This is extremely rare to find in Brazilian politics, where politicians frequently change parties and proposals in search of political windfalls. Political parties are generally formed by vaguely delineated common interests, rather than coherent principles, and here as elsewhere malandragem tends to prevail. But if, as I said earlier, Brazilians are impressed by efficiency because of its absence, they also have a strong hunger for an ideal, for ethical coherence as a counterpart to the dominant culture of the malandro. Generally they ignore this hunger, because they don't believe an ethical orientation is practical or possible. What Luiza succeeded in doing was tapping into this hunger. She allowed them to believe, even if only momentarily, in the possibility of an ethical reversal in a political scene perceived as corrupt, unresponsive to the poorer population and supportive of privileged interests.

Election day decisions

On election day in the Zona Leste the aspect of affirmation of Luiza was clear to see. Voters in the periferia did not go to the polls merely grumbling about how bad things were, but showed an enthusiasm and an decision that had been absent during almost the entire campaign. Those militants I know of the PT who did pollside pamphleting, accustomed to the rejection of campaign material that had marked the process up to this point, were taken aback by the quantity of people who approached them to ask for material of Luiza. "I'm going to vote for Luiza," people affirmed as they were handed material. "If it's not Luiza, you can throw it away." The ground

* Here I use the term "ethical" rather than "ideological" because for the ordinary person, it was not the socialist ideology that counted, but the sense of right and wrong implied by that ideology. It was the perception that the PT had a firm moral stand, when no one else seemed to, that gained the people's sympathy.



Scenes from the final rally of the PT, November 6, 1988.

The banner above says "Let's put faith in the force of the woman."

outside of the voting locations was literally carpeted with paper. Curious to see who the people were rejecting, I sifted through this material in various locations, and was struck by the almost complete absence of material of the PT on the ground. Since the PT certainly did not lack in pamphleteers, this meant the material was being kept. I imagine the situation was different in the wealthier neighborhoods of the city, the only regions in which Maluf won. But in the periferia Luiza had caught the people's hopes, or rather, had awakened the possibility of hope.

Pollside pamphleting, or boca de urna (mouth of the urn), is a crucial part of elections here, especially in a region like the Zona Leste where people have a lower level of education and vote with their emotions and interests of the moment. Many elections have been won with T-shirts and key-rings passed out at the entrance to the voting locations, as the last little push in a candidate's direction. The PT on principle rejects this sort of manipulation, insisting that a vote for the PT should be a conscious political decision. But since on election day Luiza had still not passed Maluf in the polls, her possibility of victory depended on capturing the large block of undecideds. The PT turned out its militants in the thousands for the final effort. It was interesting to note that the very seriousness and commitment with which petistas promoted their candidate at the boca de urna ended up convincing many of the undecided. They distinguished themselves from the pamphleteers of Leiva and Maluf, who received 2000 to 10,000 cruzados (about 3 to 15 dollars) to throw material at the voters. I watched a crowd of exuberant children toss sack-loads of Leiva's pamphlets into the air, initiating a snowball fight of paper that left the ground white. This time, the tactic worked only to augment the electoral cynicism. "How shameful, using children!" went the talk in the lines of people waiting to vote. The petistas, on the other hand, distributed material one by one, discussing with the people reasons to vote for Luiza. "How much are you earning to do this?" people frequently asked rather cynically, and were surprised with the answer. "Nothing. The PT is poor, like the workers. It doesn't have money to throw away. I'm doing this because I believe in it." Another point was scored for the coherence of the party, touching on the people's hunger for an ideal.

I spent the evening of election day with a group of young petistas who met to evaluate the day's experience at the boca de urna. The youth were exhilarated and awed at the thought that Luiza might actually have won. Pedro, a campaign coordinator with many years experience in the militancy of the PT, watched benevolently the excitement of the kids, but as he described to me later, he was worried about the difficulties Luiza and the PT would now face. Even so, he shared a few comments about the meaning of Luiza's victory for the trabalhadores (workers):

Luiza's victory has a special meaning for the worker, because it helps us to overcome the feeling of incompetence that the dominant society imposes on us. I know this from my experience as a metal-worker. It's sometimes hard to believe that even though I don't have advanced education, I have knowledge, experience, and competence within my area. We live hearing that the trabalhador is ignorant, incompetent, incapable of governing. Voting for Luiza, we as workers affirm that we have value, that we have competence to govern our own lives. This is why Luiza's victory is important to us.

In Pedro's comment I find the aspect of Luiza's victory that has most impressed me. Not only did the election reflect frustration with inflation and the "New Republic". Not only did it express a half-hidden hunger for an ethical approach to politics, and a respect for the coherence of the PT. But more deeply, it expressed a form of self-affirmation on the part of the working class and the poorer population. They were overcoming the message they had internalized from the dominant society, that working class people don't make good leaders; "after all, I wouldn't". Leave politics to the men in the suits and ties, since "they know better how to run things." The vote for Luiza broke this tradition. In the final week of the

campaign, when Luiza passed Leiva and her victory began to seem possible, all the qualities that had worked against her - being a woman, *nordestina*, from working-class background - suddenly swung over to her side. Marginalized on three counts, she became a symbol of the struggle of the marginalized for their dignity and their economic and political participation. And internally, she embodied their difficult struggle to have faith in themselves. While not many folks in the Zona Leste could articulate this in so many words, it could be felt in the election day exuberance, in the cockiness at having rejected Maluf, Leiva and the others in suit and tie, and in the mood of satisfaction with the victory of the little gal who came up from behind.

What happens now?

This re-claiming of faith was the psychological reversal present in Luiza's victory. The reversal is, clearly, a fragile one. The vote for Luiza was an emotional, and not an ideological, affirmation. Socialism aside, most people are not prepared even for the modest mechanisms of popular participation proposed by the PT. Luiza intends to promote the organization of the population in "popular councils" to discuss local problems and means of resolving them, a project that has already had modest success in the popular health councils of the health movement of the Zona Leste. Unaccustomed to direct participation, most people still want fast solutions from on high. "We voted for her, now let's see what she does," as the talk goes.

Despite the magical appearance of Luiza's election, magical solutions will not be forthcoming. Much like Cory Aquino in the Philippines, Luiza is in for a rough time. First of all, the PT itself will have to undergo a re-formulation. Accustomed to the hard-line tactics of opposition, the PT will have to learn to confront responsibly the complexities of administration. Second, Luiza will confront external barriers of diverse types. To accomplish its promised "inversion of priorities" and genuinely attend the interests of the poorer population, the PT will have to step on the toes of vested political and economic interests. Previous mayor Jânio Quadros has left Luiza an accumulated debt of nearly 1 billion US dollars, and she may well confront boycotts from businesses and the state and federal governments, who are extremely nervous about the rise of the PT in the elections. There is already talk of an anti-Lula coalition of the center-right to break the potential of the PT in next year's presidential elections, a strategy which depends on impeding the success of the PT's administrations around the country, and especially in the city of São Paulo.

In short, the coherence of the PT will be put to the test of fire, and Luiza will have a very hard time living up to the exaggerated expectations of change created by her victory. To some extent her success or failure will depend on the degree to which the population understands her difficulties, responds with dialogue rather than immediate demands, and rallies to her support in the face of possible boycotts or other forms of sabotage. But at this point in Brazil's bungling transition to democracy, the people's expectations may not have much stamina. The vote of confidence in Luiza could be poised for an early crash if conditions in the city don't rapidly improve. This would be one more disillusionment for the people, perhaps a more desperate one. If it seems that not even the PT can do anything, what is left? Perhaps a swing to the right? These are the serious questions emerging as the glitter cools, and as Luiza and the PT struggle to construct a plan of government that could give participatory democracy a new meaning in Brazil.

Um abraço,

