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Dear Peter,

Shortly after Luiza Erundina's victory in São Paulo's mayoral elections, Madrid's newspaper, El Pais, reported that a "political earthquake" had occurred in Brazil. Likewise, Le Monde of Paris characterized the socialist victory as an "earth tremor". In these days following the catastrophic earthquake in Armenia and the earth tremors near Brazil's nuclear reactors of Angra dos Reis, it is tempting to accept the imagery. But from my position close to the imagined epicenter, I would characterize the victory of Luiza Erundina of the PT (Worker's Party) and that of the left in other important cities in Brazil, not as an earthquake, but rather a tornado. The foundation of Brazilian political and economic life has not been shaken. Rather, an unexpected whirlwind has touched down in several points in Brazil, frightening and/or exciting many, promising to turn accustomed routines on their heads, but of questionable permanence, vulnerable to shifts in the winds. At least, that is how the situation looks one week before Erundina takes office as the first socialist mayor in the fourth largest city in the world.

In the month and a half since Erundina's victory, it has been interesting to watch how the PT prepares itself for the responsibilities of government administration. Accustomed to the confrontational tactics of opposition, the proposals of the PT for social transformation have until now remained mostly on the level of rhetoric. Now the rhetoric itself requires redefinition as the party confronts the real life problems of the day. The tension between rhetoric and reality has appeared frequently in the post-election interviews with Erundina and other leaders of the PT. For example, what does one mean by the word "revolution" when one is preparing to take control of a city government? In the euphoria of the victory rally, Erundina declared that her victory represented "the beginning of the socialist revolution in Brazil". Later, she tempered that statement a bit, saying that her election was "a peaceful revolution, by the vote." The PT's candidate for president in 1989, Luis Ignacio de Silva (known as "Lula") was more cautious in his choice of words. Rather than a "revolution", Lula called the victory "the beginning of a process of concientization in society". From "revolution" to "process of concientization" is a big rhetorical step back. Questioned by journalists, Luiza was forced to qualify her initial statement. "The concept of revolution is very wide, and includes the creation of new values". She believes that her election, as a northeasterner, a woman, from the PT, and "with this face" incorporates new values that "are socialist".

Later the matter gained heat in a television interview in which Erundina was pressured to respond as to whether the PT would ever abandon electoral politics and

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promote armed struggle. In the heat of the debate Erundina resorted to one of the basic tenets of "petista" ideology, that electoral politics in themselves will never lead to socialism. "What leads to socialism is the advance of class consciousness, of the organization of the workers, and of an alternative project of society. . . By disputing elections we are playing the democratic game within the limits given by the society and the regime. This doesn't mean that we abdicate our strategic objectives, which go much further . . ."

Erundina was making a distinction essential to her administration, between two fields of action: the here and now of elected administration, clearly limited as to the implantation of socialism, and the long term project of "radical social transformation". She would not have raised the question of armed struggle had not the interviewers practically shoved it into her mouth. Goaded by persistent questions, she admitted that "at some moment, if the conditions are given for this, there is no other alternative. If a majority decides for armed struggle as a condition for the structural transformation of society, then a political party is not going to impede that this happens." But she insisted that those "objective conditions" for an armed struggle do not exist now in Brazil. The next day the principal newspapers of São Paulo, which seem determined to feed middle class fears, blasted the headline, "ERUNDINA SAYS ONLY ARMED STRUGGLE LEADS TO SOCIALISM".

New at this game of political interviewing, Luiza had conducted herself as she would have at an internal debate of the PT. She was trapped by the press into defending a sociological thesis, which when seen from the point of view of city government, makes her seem more radical than she really is. Realizing her mistake, she called a press conference the next day in which she took a brisk practical tone. "It would be idiocy to think that winning election for mayor of São Paulo means having the conditions for the victory of socialism," she said, insisting that she planned to govern "within the limits of the capitalist system". She criticized the press for manipulating headlines and for "centering the debate on questions that are not of the order of the day, rather than helping the administration diagnose the problems of São Paulo".

This incident shows the rather rocky process of readjustment the PT is going through as it equips itself for administration. The very rhetoric of the PT has had to change. Take this statement of Erundina: "Realistically, I know that there do not

exist the objective conditions for a socialist administration in São Paulo. Our administration will be democratic, popular, and competent". The words "democratic and popular" are familiar enough, but the terms "realistic" and "competent" are not part of the traditional petista vocabulary. They have not needed to be, since as opposition one makes criticism and demands without having to work within a global view of the limits to government resources. This challenge to realism and responsibility will be the test of the maturity of the PT as it assumes its new place in the national balance of powers.



Luiza talks to the press soon after her election.

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One of the questions frequently asked of Erundina soon after her victory was how she would deal with land invasions during her administration. Organized invasions by poor families of unoccupied private or city-owned land were one of the primary headaches of previous mayor Jânio Quadros, whose most frequent response was to send in the metropolitan police to dislodge the invaders. Luiza herself, a long time activist in the Movimento Sem Terra (meaning, "without land") that organizes such invasions, prefers to call them "occupations", since "40% of the urban area of São Paulo is vacant, while half its population is living in subhuman conditions". Although like earlier interviews, the question about land invasions seems designed to feed middle class fears ("with Luiza, your backyard isn't safe"), it points to an essential question about how the relationship between the administration and the social movements will have to change under Erundina's government.

The PT now finds itself on both sides of the fence. Up to this point, militants of the PT have been among the principal stimulating forces in these movements. Along with activists from the Catholic base communities (who generally are themselves petistas), they help to organize and give direction to the spontaneous expressions of discontent among the poorer population, in areas such as health, housing, education, transportation, sewage, etc. To take land occupations as an example, without the leadership of these activists to provide internal organization, educate the families as to their responsibilities, and negotiate with government for the disappropriation and urbanization of the land, an invasion would turn into a "winner takes all", resulting in one more squalid encampment of tents and shacks, like so many favelas in São Paulo.*

Rather than initiating a city-wide epidemic of invasions, Erundina believes that the number of occupations will decrease under her administration. She emphasizes that the social movements, including the organizers of land occupations, were "co-responsible" for her candidacy, and that her program of government was elaborated in the struggles of those movements. Besides this, the change in government attitude will tend to relax the necessity of extreme measures such as occupations. "Exactly because of the character that our government will have - open, transparent, with dialog, with effective popular participation, I am certain that we will anticipate

* It is interesting here to note the ethical foundation of land occupations. Much fuss was made in the press about Erundina's statement that the right of occupation takes precedence over the right of property. In her words, the question of land has to do with "the right to survival, a right related to the social function of property. I believe that when you have three million people living in cortiços (buildings sub-divided into one-room apartments) and another million living in favelas, while 40% of the urban area lies vacant, you have a situation in which property is not fulfilling its social function. It is not respecting the limits set by the institution of the right to property." Despite the middle class hysteria on the subject, Erundina is not questioning the right to property in itself, but rather opening the moral question raised by a certain restricted use (or abuse) of that property. Likewise, when the Movimento Sem Terra organizes an occupation, the people involved don't demand to be given land for free, but expect to pay for their lots, at prices within their means, of course. Thus an occupation is not "robbing from the rich to give to the poor", but rather an organized attempt to pressure the government to urbanize a vacant area. And there is an educative dimension as well. Both in the process of the internal organization of the occupation, which includes an extensive process of community discussion, and in the commitment to pay for their lots, the people learn to assume an attitude of responsibility, as juxtaposed to the common Brazilian attitude of waiting for things to be given them.

these extreme situations in which people are obligated to resort to measures that, I repeat, are extreme, because all other resources have been tried before arriving at this point."

Note here three of the key words of Luiza's project of government: "transparency", "dialog", and "participation". As I noted earlier, the PT is struggling to discover what these words mean in practice. And it is not only the government that must make this discovery, but the movements as well, which will have to learn an unaccustomed sense of responsibility in their demands on government. When the PT and the popular movements were in a position of opposition, all demands were equally legitimate, born of the immediacy of social necessities in a given neighborhood or region. Because the authorities most often refused to discuss these necessities, the tactics used were confrontational: commissions, rallies, encampments, caravans from the favelas demanding entrance into to the administrative offices in the center of the city. The housing movement felt it had the right to pressure with the same force as the education or health movements, without any need of establishing priorities among them. Because of this characteristic, the social movements tend to foster the idea of the all-powerful state, which if it wanted, would have the necessary resources to attend all of the various needs of the population. A sense of indignation is cultivated, which on the one hand is a necessary reversal of the usual unquestioning resignation of the people, but on the other hand works against a realistic sense of the limits of government resources. Of course, in most Brazilian governments this sort of realism is nearly impossible, because of the tendency of governors to obscure or simply lie about spending distribution, throwing into question their expressed "dedication" to social necessities. For example, in the teacher's strike I described in AEM-5, Governor Orestes Quércia insisted that the government simply had no money to raise salaries. But since he refused to give a complete and open account of government spending, his appeals for collaboration had no moral force. No one believed he was telling the truth (since if you are hiding something, it appears that you must have it).

Erundina has promised to make it clear to the population at every step where government resources are being directed. This puts her in the moral position to request collaboration from the social movements that helped to elect her, given the extreme financial limits she faces during the first year of her administration. She takes office with a billion dollar debt (the largest in history), with unpaid contracts of the previous administration to be completed, and with a truncated tax receipt reduced at the last minute by the bad will of outgoing councilmen. Although she will be able to begin what she calls an "inversion of priorities" toward the poorer population, she will not possibly be able to respond to all of the expectations raised by her election, especially during this difficult first year. She will have to establish priorities among the multitudinous demands surging from the movements, imposing limits that in the first moment will be hard for the population to understand. The movements, in turn, will have to modify the spirit and content of their demands, learning to negotiate within the limits and priorities of Luiza's government. This is a challenge to the maturity and responsibility of the movements, which will now be asked to take their place within the cohesive functioning of the city organism, rather than simply batting on its head to make it look in their direction.

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Before I close this report I should say something about the meaning of the word "participation" in Erundina's plan of government. This topic deserves a newsletter in itself, but here I'll give just a basic indication of the difficulties involved. One of the principal proposals of the PT during the campaign and now in the post-election discussions is the creation of so-called "popular councils". While



Scenes from a land occupation, organized last February by the Movimento Sem Terra in the Zona Leste of São Paulo. After a month of negotiations, the occupiers were removed by force. The government promised housing for the families, but as of yet nothing has been done.



The Movimento Sem Terra organizes a march of favela and cortiço dwellers to the offices of the Secretary of Habitation, in the center of São Paulo. Above, the sign reads, "WE ARE SEEDS OF JUSTICE. WE FIGHT FOR AGRARIAN REFORM". Below, the marchers form a commission to carry their demands to the secretary.

such councils have long been part of the platform of the party, no one in the PT is exactly sure what they are. As everything in the PT must pass through an intense process of internal discussion, there has been a flurry of seminars and debates on every level of the party, not to mention interviews and newspaper editorials, as the PT struggles to come to a consensual understanding of the nature of these councils. The basic definition goes something like this: "autonomous and independent instruments of popular participation in the decisions, in the control, and in the fiscalization of the administrative machine." They are an attempt to go beyond the limits of traditional representative democracy and give the population a more direct voice in day-to-day of city administration. But beyond this basic rhetoric arises a mountain of doubts as to how to put popular councils into practice.

For example, how will these councils be organized, and by whom? There is a growing consensus that the councils must be autonomous, independent both of the administration and of political parties (including the PT). This is to avoid that they turn into mere apparatus of the state or party, rather than authentic expressions of the needs and proposals of the communities. In that case, should they be organized in open assemblies, Athenian style? Should they have elected neighborhood representatives? Or perhaps representatives from the social movements and community organizations (including unions and commerce clubs)? How many councils should there be? And what role should petistas play in this process of mobilization?

A second critical question is what relationship the councils will have with city government. Will they be simply direct manifestations of the will of a local segment of the population, whose influence on government policies depends on its force of organization and lobbying pressure? Or will they have a more institutionalized connection, with decision-making power that prevails over that of the mayor and city council? The worry is that if the councils are merely institutional organs created from the top down, without strong roots in community organization, they will be more vulnerable to manipulation and most likely will not survive a change in government. On the other hand, the councils will need some sort of institutional mechanism to have their proposals heard at an administrative level. While the party as a whole has not reached a consensus, it appears that Luiza is moving in the direction of two types of councils, one which would be organized by the mayor's office as an institutional channel, and the other emerging autonomously from the popular movements and community organization. As one of Erundina's aids said, "we can, for example, create a popular council to act jointly with the regional administrations. As for the autonomous councils, all that we can do is respect their independence."

These councils will not be starting completely from scratch. Scattered around the country are various attempts to open channels of popular participation in city governments, such as the health, education, and finance councils of Diadema, a neighboring city that in 1982 elected the first mayor of the PT in the country. In São Paulo itself, there exists the embryonic experience of the health councils organized by the health movement of the Zona Leste, the city's poor Eastern zone. These councils, which have been in existence for nine years, arose out of the community movements to pressure the government to establish hospitals and health posts in the Zona Leste. Their purpose is to fiscalize these health posts and pressure the government for improved services. The 76 local councils each elect biannually a board of 20 directors from the community, as well as a regional coordination of the movement as a whole. After much struggle, the councils were recognized by the secretary of health, although there is still resistance to extending their role. As a woman from the movement said in an interview, "fiscalizing and making demands is easy, but interfering in planning is very difficult. There is much resistance to popular participation in official organs."

Erundina hopes to strengthen the channels of participation of such community organizations. But there will be several problems involved in the councils from the start. First will be the drainage of leaders from the social movements, who would be capable of organizing such councils, into the administrative posts of the city government. The number of competent, experienced, and politically adept militants of the PT is limited, and since the party did not expect to win, everyone possible is now being sucked into the government. This could result in the scarcity of strong community leaders who understand that community organization does not mean manipulation and that helping the people articulate their necessities does not mean putting words into their mouths. The councils will need to have mature leaders who understand the necessity of collaboration with Erundina rather than making excessive unilateral demands. And another threat comes from the conservative sectors of the city, especially those connected to local economic power, who will fight to retain the comfortable, protected position they had under previous mayor Jânio Quadros. Although the spokesmen of these sectors have denounced the councils as a "sovietization" of São Paulo, they will very likely try to coopt and control the councils in the way they have long coopted the vote among the uneducated people of the poorer neighborhoods.

In its eagerness to accomplish a radical democratization of the structures of power in the city, the PT may be creating one more channel for the destabilization of Erundina's government, something which many forces in the city have openly stated they intend to try. But the PT is firm in believing that this is a risk it must take in order to continue coherent with its basic principle of decentralized popular government. The experiment promises to be an interesting one, full of potential pitfalls, but with implications that go beyond São Paulo. I see the PT as part of a worldwide thrust of the "new left", which, soured on the authoritarian and bureaucratic practices of classical socialist governments, is struggling for a redefinition of the meaning of socialism with a modern reference. This puts Luiza Erundina within the same realm as Gorbachev (on a lesser level, of course). Both are attempting to create an administrative practice that combines the difficult goals of social justice, economic competence, and decentralized participatory democracy. This is a difficult task, but a fascinating historical challenge.

Um abraço,

Arn Michels

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Children at a rally of the health movement of the Zona Leste. Their sign reads, "WE WANT TO PARTICIPATE - HEALTH COUNCIL"