

BRAZIL

The vote of the Brazilian electorate last November was unambiguously against the military regime. The four opposition parties together got 62% of the votes, won 51% of seats in congress, and the governorships of states with 58% of the country's 126 million population. This was achieved in spite of unprecedented violence and corruption, with dozens of candidates killed, gerrymandering legislation, selective government spending, smear campaigns and plain fraud. The results marked the failure of the regime to divide the opposition and to perpetuate its threadbare claims to legitimacy.

In anticipation of this defeat, the regime changed the constitution last June to ensure its continued control of key policy areas, and of the choice of the next president. Even during the election campaign it was clear that the results would have no effect on its economic policies. Yet more drastic austerity measures were already being secretly agreed with international bankers as the price for renegotiation of the \$90bn foreign debt. The Reagan administration and the IMF have moved quickly to make special arrangements for Brazil, averting dangers of a default or any moves by the regime to use Brazil's position as the second largest debtor after Mexico and the Third World's largest industrial economy to press internationally for a restructuring of the Western financial system.

While not modifying the regime's policies, the election results do put the opposition in a better position to mobilise the social unrest the policies will provoke. Most votes went to the Brazilian Democratic Movement (PMDB), which won nine state governorships and 200 of the 479 congressional seats. It benefitted from the electoral machine and role of protest vote portmanteau which it inherited from the MDB



in 1979 when other opposition parties were allowed to form. The regime's intention then of splitting the opposition has not paid off; only in one of the 22 states did a division of opposition votes allow the pro-regime Democratic Social Party (PDS) to win.

The PMDB is a broad liberal alliance without a clear political line, with support ranging from businessmen unhappy with the last two year's of sharp recession to the illegal but tolerated Brazilian Communist Party (PCB) and other small left wing parties. But PCB follows a united front strategy within the PMDB and strongly supports the regime's political relaxation, in the perhaps optimistic hope that one day the party will be legalised.

The single most important opposition politician to come to the fore through the elections is the 60-year-old populist leader, Lionel Brizola. Using a Democratic Labour Party (PDT) label, he was able to capture the key governorship of Rio de Janeiro due to the unpopularity of the corrupt outgoing PMDB governor. Brizola was endorsed by the 80-year old former PCB leader, Carlos Luis Prestes, who could not go along with his party's support for the PMDB in Rio. Regarded by the army as the evil genius of the populist government of Joao Goulart which it overthrew in 1964, Brizola may yet be blocked from taking office next March. His hurriedly concocted party sends an odd assortment of 24 politicians to congress. Another 13 seats were won by the Brazilian Labour party (PTB) which has rival claims to the populist mantle of Goulart.

The only socialist party to contest the elections, the Workers Party (PT), won few votes, returning only eight deputies. This

was perhaps partly due to tactical voting by many PT supporters for the PMDB. The PT has the strongest party organisation, extending over the whole of this vast country only three years after its foundation by Sao Paulo trade unionists. The party has been built from the bottom up, and defines its policies through this process without reference to any imported ideology.

In the elections the PT concentrated on politicisation of workers and recruitment rather than on canvassing votes. According to its president, metalworker Luis Inacio da Silva, Lula, it was the duty of the party to combat any illusions that real power was at stake. The PCB resents the threat of the PT to its claimed leadership of the working class, but its accusations of splitting the opposition have not been borne out by the elections.

In congress the four opposition parties will probably be able to push political liberalisation forward, but the left within it will not be strong enough to increase workers' rights, such as the right to strike. The nine PMDB state governors and Brizola will have impressive administrative machines at their disposal, especially in the industrial triangle of Sao Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and Minas Gerais, which together produce 70% of GNP. How far the regime allows the newly elected opposition politicians to go as federal legislators and state administrators remains to be seen. In the long run it may be more significant how much political support and leadership they give to the mounting mobilisation of factory workers, shanty town dwellers and landless peasants.

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