

Some lessons of Brazil and the PT history for Quebec solidaire

Monday 5 November 2018, by [BEAUDET Pierre](#) (Date first published: 29 October 2018).

Pierre Beaudet has written an article on Bolsonaro in Brazil, which we posted on our website [1]. At the end, he reflects on the lessons for Québec solidaire of the « professional dangers of power », of institutions, and their impact on the PT. We reproduce below this section of the article.

Dark spots of the left [in Brazil]

[...] the PT emerged [...] with a project of emancipation that boasted some new features. The need to “democratize the democracy” and redistribute wealth to the popular sectors resulted in a broadly attractive and arguably hegemonic project. [...] Once elected in 2012 after a decade of slow and partial victories, the PT enjoyed a state of grace, [nevertheless] PT governments continued to refuse the major demand of the MST [among others] to implement an extensive agrarian reform, thereby reinforcing the power of agrobusiness, the most dynamic sector of Brazilian capitalism. The same thing can be said for the political system.

[...] Around the small nucleus that had piloted the PT to the top of the state there was a small army of “cadres and competents,” mostly militants who had spent years fighting in the unions, the municipalities, in education and the media. These cadres and skilled elements had some means, a little education, some capacities and naturally they became the backbone of the new power. For many, they did so with honesty, even selflessness, in conditions that were often difficult. For others, this transformation represented a real ascension in the social order. [...]

Apart from the MST, which remained a special case, the popular movements were largely “decapitated” by the exodus of these “cadres and competents” who were the guiding spirits in the unions and many other movements. Once ensconced in the state apparatus, they found themselves de facto in a new situation in which there was still some complicity with the popular movements but also, gradually and increasingly, some distance. [...] The gap between the PT and the popular layers became apparent in 2013 when the people took to the streets to denounce the increases in transit fares and megalomaniac projects. But the left plugged its ears. A decisive moment, this convinced a multi-hued Right to go into action.

Tomorrow's challenges

Brazil will experience some very dark days and we will have to support our comrades to the best of our ability — for example, by keeping a close watch on the actions of the Canadian state and Canadian businesses that will choose to collaborate with the fascists. [2] In the short term, the Brazilian movements will try to do two things at the same time. They will resist, they have no choice.

They will also debate, to try to understand, to unravel their contradictions. It is likely that the leaders of the PT, Lula in the lead, will choose the path of least resistance, of retreat, waiting for the return of things without shaking the cage too much. They will say, with some reason, that this is the only possible choice, that the relationship of forces is too unfavourable. They will blame the people and the popular movements instead of accepting their responsibilities in the debacle. But there will be others who will try, in conditions of great adversity, to hold out as the MST will likely do. We have to stand by them.

Thinking further

Like many countries of the “pink wave” in Latin America, Brazil was an important laboratory of left renewal. The importance this has meant in getting the left out of its vanguardist ruts, the misplaced legacy of a petrified and harmful “Marxism-Leninism,” cannot be under-stated. But the present defeats also weigh heavily. What should we make of them? The rise of an electoral left is not the goal, it is not how we will change society. It is a means, and again a means that involves many risks. Many indeed. There is the problem mentioned above of the “cadres and competents” who ensconce themselves in relative comfort, abandoning the popular movements from which they came. There are the pitfalls of a “political game” where you pretend to make decisions while the real levers of power are well hidden in the interstices of the banks and large corporations. There are the enormous risks of actually confronting the systems of power knowing very well their capacity to destroy, manipulate, annihilate.

Act now

Faced with all this, it is necessary to resist the pseudo-projects of “fleeing from politics,” taking refuge in comfort zones where one can dream of experiencing society on a very small scale. Anticipatory projects such as cooperatives, mini-communes or whatever are important. But it is not that, in itself, that will break the power. So we have no choice but to go into the swamp, knowing what to expect. At a time when Québec solidaire hopes to change the state of affairs, we can be both happy and cautious. It will be interesting to see whether the innovations that served QS so well are furthered, so that we can avoid potential slippages. For example,

- The party must remain a place of active and lively debate, and not be content to sink into facile formulas that may be electorally advantageous but may eventually create the illusion that we can change things without making changes. At QS we are not at that point but there is a small risk that the appetite for an electoral breakthrough will bring us down.
- Our MNAs and “cadres and competents,” which will increase tenfold in the next period, must accept — as Manon [Massé], Gabriel [Nadeau-Dubois], Amir [Khadir] and others have done — that they are not the “owners” of QS. Nor should they create a situation in which their material situation departs too much from that of their electorate. Here’s an idea: why not establish a rule that elected members put 10% of their income at the disposal of the social movements, and thus outside of their control? 10% of their income? [\[3\]](#) A kind of “popular tax” for the movements that are the backbone of the transformation.
- The party’s resources should be decentralized, not “captured” at the top by “advisors,” whether experts or not, whose role is to support the elected members. Yes, the MNAs need some in order to perform their parliamentary work, but QS is not just that. Advisors should not be “gate-keepers” preventing the membership from participating effectively in the debate. The big difference for QS, and not only for the next election, is dynamic associations that can build convergence with the mass movements. Theme-based commissions and committees will produce popular education tools and

analyses on the burning issues of the day, and not just answers for this or that parliamentary committee.

Changing society entails a relentless, determined, struggle against an implacable adversary that must be neutralized if it is not to neutralize us.

Pierre Beaudet, October 29, 2018

Footnotes

[1] ESSF (article 46749), [The lesson of Brazil – The scenarios. Dark spots of the left. Tomorrow's challenges](#).

[2] CBC News was quick off the mark: “For Canadian business, a Bolsonaro presidency could open new investment opportunities, especially in the resource sector, finance and infrastructure, as he has pledged to slash environmental regulations in the Amazon rainforest and privatize some government-owned companies.” Later, in response to mass protests, the public broadcaster retreated, while insisting that “it is a well researched and sourced analysis piece about one aspect of that election.” – RF.

[3] Such a “tax” could easily produce \$100,000 per year, or close to a half million by the end of a mandate. It could be used to establish a foundation, independent of QS, that could manage these funds while ensuring their permanence.