

## Critical Debates

# Lula, the “New Unionism,” and the PT: How Factory Workers Came to Change the World, or At Least Brazil

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- Bourne, Richard, *Lula of Brazil: The Story So Far*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007. Photographs, bibliography, index, 285 pages; hardcover \$40, paperback \$17.95.
- Ferreira, Marieta de Moraes, and Alexandre Fortes, eds., *Muitos caminhos, uma estrela: memórias de militantes do PT* [Many Paths, One Star: Recollections of Militants of the PT]. Volume 1. São Paulo: Editora Fundação Perseu Abramo, 2008. Photographs, biographical notes, glossary, index, bibliography, 447 pages.
- Negro, Antonio Luigi, *Linhas de montagem. O industrialismo nacional-desenvolvimentista e a sindicalização dos trabalhadores, 1945–1978* [Assembly Lines: National-Developmentalist Industrialism and the Unionization of the Workers]. São Paulo: Editorial Boitempo, 2004. Bibliography, 322 pages.

Students of Brazilian politics would probably agree with Richard Bourne that the “extraordinary and controversial” trajectory of Luis Inácio Lula da Silva, “arguably the most significant [president] since Getúlio Vargas,” is like “a thread running through modern Brazilian history and, most would say, for the better” (xi, 209, 230, 210). Having come to know Brazil in the 1960s, this retired British journalist has crafted “an accessible political biography” that ends with Lula’s reelection in 2006 (xii). He also admits the difficulties of writing about an individual—from the outside and without academic pretensions—who is “not only a man, but also a myth” (Bourne, 230); someone born in anonymous rural misery who emerges as a strike leader, founds a radical political party and union confederation, and then reaches—in his fourth and fifth campaigns—the presidency of the world’s 11th-largest economy and 5th-largest country in population.

Yet the narrative potential of Lula’s story has garnered surprisingly little attention. Since 1981, only 13 works in 4 languages—most by journalists like Bourne—have attempted a semibiographical treatment of Lula. Of the 7 serious attempts, *Lula of Brazil* stands out for its attempt to achieve a balanced view of the radical transformations in the life of

Brazil's 64-year-old president. After dispatching his early life and emergence as a labor leader, Bourne devotes two-thirds of the text to the years after Lula's first presidential campaign in 1989, and half the book to his presidency.

Writing for English speakers "with only a vague knowledge of modern Brazil," Bourne deserves special praise for ensuring that Lula's "own vital personality shines through" (ii). Lula's personal and family life figures prominently, even in narrating union, political, and presidential affairs, and Bourne remains attentive to his subject's "demotic and larger-than-life personality" (155).

Overall, Bourne offers a reasonable summary of much that is said about Lula by Brazilians, and at times about Lula by Lula. His Lula has a "natural gift for leadership" and exhibits an instinctive, intuitive, nonideological, and conciliatory approach to politics (21, 199, 167–68, 47, 79, 87, 105–6). Buoyed by a fairytale ascent, the empathetic Lula enjoys a mutual identification with the popular majority that translates into the author's occasional use of terms of like *charisma*, *messianism*, and *populism* (115, 22, 53, 193, 225). Yet to "naturalize" Lula's gifts and talents in this fashion places them outside history, while such descriptive terms suggest a stable "essence" to a man whose career is also marked by its opposites. Indeed, Bourne's account underlines the difficulty of crafting an analytical and historical interpretation that crosses successive conjunctures.

To avoid predictable truisms demands original research and rigorous analysis of the sort epitomized by *Linhas de montagem*. This penetrating historical monograph on local worker activism and trade unionism offers new insights into Lula's trade union origins in the industrial ABC region of São Paulo (so named after the key *municípios* of Santo André, São Bernardo do Campo, and São Caetano do Sul). This rigorous academic volume includes essays and ends with a clutch of interviews with founders of Lula's Workers' Party (PT). The interviews address a key question that Bourne also poses about Lula's first term in office: the surprising lack of impact of the corruption crisis of 2005 on the PT's coherence and vote in the following year's election. Both books demonstrate that Lula cannot be understood without a solid grasp of the world of working-class life and radical politics in which he earned his spurs.

## **THE INSTITUTIONAL AND IDEOLOGICAL ROOTS OF THE LULA-LED STRIKES OF THE 1970s**

To fully appreciate Antonio Negro's contribution, one must emphasize what *Linhas de montagem* does and does not do. Unlike earlier studies in Brazilian labor history, *Linhas* does not focus on the state's legal and political role in framing the country's government-linked and -financed trade unions. These are organized on a geographic basis, one per indus-

try, with exclusive legal rights of representation (*unicidade*). In this system, unions are barred from within the factory, while conflict is channeled toward indirect negotiations through a system of labor courts that also handle individual disputes (French 2004).

Nor is *Linhas* a study of the trade union as a social, economic, or political institution. And it is only secondarily concerned with the union's bureaucratic functioning, the conduct of negotiations, or its provision of legal or social welfare services (*assistencialismo*). All in all, the enduring disputes about the role of reformist or revolutionary parties during the Populist Republic or its immediate aftermath do not stand at the heart of this fine book. What interests Negro are the actions of those workers who came to give their allegiance to, or allied with, such groups, while not ignoring workers without such sympathies, a group that would prove vital to the post-1964 trajectory of the metalworkers' union of São Bernardo do Campo.

Throughout, Negro provides the reader with a clear sense of how worker activists operated in the factories, on the streets, and in the trade unions. To this end, the book traces a vast array of practices that sought to build working-class strength from the bottom up, through shop floor organizing and work stoppages and strikes. The abundance of evidence adduced backs Negro's claim to have uncovered "unknown facets" of workplace activism (44), long before they were "discovered" in ABC in the 1970s. So, what general insights does Negro derive from his focus on shop floor and union militancy as it evolved across a quarter-century in the industrial districts of greater São Paulo?

First, Negro's uncompromising focus on the "state machinery for producing fear and consensus" (312) forces readers to relativize the contrast between "democracy" and "dictatorship." Indeed, this study provides shocking evidence that even in the most democratic pre-1964 conjunctures, the government played an overwhelmingly repressive role in the "asphyxiation of factory unionism," a phenomenon never distinguished from political dissidence (aka subversion) (214). As Negro notes dryly, neither populism nor employer authority survived solely on the basis of speeches, "favors and backslapping. Informants, secret agents, foremen and night watchmen were also necessary," as well as billy clubs and cavalry charges in the streets (44; all translations by this reviewer).

A second contribution is definitively to overturn established understandings about the prevalence and importance of factory-level organizing before the 1970s (207). As Negro notes, "employers, political and labor leaders have long denied or downplayed the existence of independent revindicative action in the factory. If it existed, they claimed, it was quantitatively unimportant, politically manipulated, and unable to impose itself on the bosses, because workers simply weren't interested" (292). This minimization of worker militancy served to reaffirm an old

Brazilian discourse that presented the common people as uniquely peaceful and cordial (*um povo cordial e pacífico*). Echoed in some views of Lula, working people are portrayed as naïve innocents prone to fall into the hands of others, “without defense or conscious decision,” whether manipulated through “populist demagoguery [or] the politicization of the PCB [Partido Comunista Brasileiro]” (or the PT’s *éminence grise*, José Dirceu) (158).

Yet the false academic picture of labor in the Populist Republic (1945–64) derived far more centrally from the intraleftist polemics and disputes of the 1970s (311). After the disappointments of 1964, the Communist Party, which had been hegemonic on the left, was denounced as accommodationist, while the pre-1964 labor movement was labeled a form of top-down “populist unionism” (Negro, 226–27; French 1992). Although motivated by different political objectives, the interpretive frameworks of both the New Left and the right helped forge a seemingly coherent “corporatist consensus” (French 1992) that was definitively abandoned by researchers only in this decade (see McCreery 2008 for an excellent survey of recent monographs).

Research in the police archives allows Negro to take us inside the factory gate, while the actions of strikers in the streets lands another blow against images of submissive and humble workers. As he notes about the 1957 “Strike of the Four Hundred Thousand,” “the workers were mobilized, attentive, and dissatisfied,” and expressed their “discontent with inflation and with [union] leaders who did not advance their complaints” (212). As for intralabor movement politics, he finds “a laborite unionism profoundly influenced” by the Partido Comunista Brasileiro (PCB), or by the PCB’s alliance with the Partido Trabalhista Brasileiro (PTB). “There was energy, will, identity, subtlety and strategies—departing from the work place. We can thus leave to one side the theory of populist unionism” (305).

An emphasis on rank-and-file mobilization is not new in the literature on workers in São Paulo (Wolfe 1993). What Negro offers, in a third significant contribution, is a more balanced judgment compared to earlier, politically driven leftist commentary that juxtaposed “a bureaucratized union without representativeness” against an idealized but “self-activated worker rank and file” (Negro, 27) distant from state-controlled unions and the Communist Party (Wolfe 1993, who did not have access to DOPS records, is criticized by Negro, 25–26). And Negro’s hypothesis that in practice there was more than one Communist Party is not premised on pitting party leadership (bad) against its rank and file or trade union members (good) (Negro, 72–74).

It is not that Negro fails to recognize “ambiguities, contradictions, and zigzags by the PCB in the face of worker activism,” but rather that he sees them as tensions inherent in the relationship between political

parties and social movements. Their origin can be found, he writes, "in the friction between the attachment of the leading party nucleus to an image of itself as the only actor capable of understanding and modifying capitalism and its [simultaneous] belief that the CP was an institutional and social expression of the experience of the subaltern classes" (72–73). In approaching the question empirically, he finds a contrast, but not necessarily the antagonism suggested by those who postulate "a rank and file CP (democratic) and a CP of the high leadership (Machiavellian [*cúpula*])" (73). This insight has obvious relevance to the history of the PT and its allied union confederation both before and during Lula's presidential administration.

## DIGNIFYING THE FACTORY

While dramatizing the overwhelming force of their enemies, the book shows the stubborn persistence, courage, and cunning of labor activists as they sought, with limited but what can only seem surprising success, to fight against employers, multiple police agencies, the state's labor apparatus, and their own class's weaknesses and immaturity. It is here that Negro makes his fourth contribution, by reopening an old debate about the impact of the massive rural migration that brought Lula's family, among others, to São Paulo. The earliest empirical research on metalworkers in 1957 and 1963 suggested that such workers had, at best, a limited capacity for concerted action (13). These sociological accounts linked the posited weakness of trade unionism to rural migration, upward social mobility, and the workers' at best diffuse sense of class consciousness. Subsequent accounts criticized and then disproved such structuralist explanations (French 1992) but left unanswered the question of what role their rural origin did play in the emergence of this new factory proletariat or in shaping its worldview (the issue has recently reemerged on the scholarly agenda).

Looking at the process developmentally, Negro notes that the auto plant was indeed "a new space for the overwhelming majority of those who lived within it. It redefined traditions, modes of life, practices, values, and identities, but never," he insists, "made of workers a thing" (157). Yet he gives this affirmation a new twist with a hypothesis that the meaning of factory labor in the new auto plants was different because of the nationalist thrust of the late 1950s under President Juscelino Kubitschek's "fifty years of development in five." In a deeply hierarchical society, industrialists went beyond the simple desire to control workers by exalting "not only manual labor but the life trajectories of their employees" (like Lula), paying tribute "to their ability to learn, their versatility, and willingness to work hard (*no duro*)" for the good of the nation. This company rhetoric, Negro suggests, was "appropriated

by the unskilled who came to see themselves as dignified"; they were not, after all, "the employees of some little factory [*fabriquetal*]. They were 'peons' [*peões*] of powerful enterprises disposed to industrialize the country. . . . When this 'factory patriotism' was dressed up in union tones," as would occur under the leadership of Lula, a skilled worker, the invocation of that dignity—and its defense against faithless employers and a dishonest government—proved a powerful tool that fostered worker mobilization (309–10).

The fifth contribution of *Linhas* is to establish the continuities and discontinuities across successive activist generations in the factories and union halls of rapidly industrializing São Paulo. This part of the story begins with the opposition within ABC's unions before 1964 (the so-called *democráticos*), which was led by workers active in the local parishes under the influence of ABC's reformist Bishop Dom Jorge Marcos de Oliveira. These anticommunist efforts were connected, however remotely and indirectly, to the objectives of top political, union, and business leaders who, like the leaders of the United States, opposed PTB President João Goulart for tolerating communists more than previous stronger presidents did (190).

After the 1964 coup ousted the PCB-PTB leadership, the *democráticos* were catapulted into union office, but found their actions decisively shaped by factors beyond their control. A government-induced recession from 1965 to 1967 cut employment in the auto sector and fostered industrial consolidation, while a series of antilabor measures undermined established worker rights, including job tenure (*estabilidade*). The "atavistic" antiunionism shared by employers and the new regime was compounded by their "aversion to the revindicative demands" of workers (Negro, 298–99). Most important, the determination of wage increases was placed in the hands of government economic planners, who set them at less than the rate of inflation during the ensuing Brazilian economic miracle (1968–74). This provided a key grievance that Lula highlighted early in his union presidency (258–59, 309).

Segregated from the political system, their rights attacked, and subjected to poor salaries, activist workers by 1968 did not "adhere to a trade unionism favorable to private enterprise" (Negro, 258). Given "the accumulation of resentment and frustration," the U.S. consul in São Paulo was convinced that the military government had unthinkingly created the conditions for the growth or return of the left (259, 291). But it would not be a return to power by the Communists, whose influence declined after 1964 because of their sharp internal divisions as much, if not more, than their persecution (226–27). With its activists dispersed, dismayed, and discredited, the PCB lost its centrality as the only leftist group active in a labor movement that was now characterized by a swirl of opposition forces.

The PCB's former opponents, the *democráticos*, as Negro calls them, would themselves experience complex mutations. Some congealed into a closed group marked by an accommodationist posture and decisively lost influence (305). This was not the path, however, of all who had defended an orderly and disciplined form of trade unionism against what they saw as the politicized excesses and irresponsibility of the PCB-led unions of the pre-1964 period. This group of non-PCB activists were also familiar with U.S.-style rhetoric about "true" or "authentic" trade unionism, whose claim to be nonideological provided some cover in a hostile environment. In his sixth and pathbreaking contribution, Negro helps us to understand the complexities in this group, which he calls the *sindicalistas autênticos* (authentic trade unionists).

The election slates that emerged in ABC's metalworkers' union after 1964 had combined some of the pre-1964 generation, especially if they had not held office, with a courageous and increasingly radicalized group of *igreijeros* (the semiderogatory name for the church folk) backed by Santo André's bishop and priests. These activists were linked to the new revolutionary parties founded by students and intellectuals, especially *Ação Popular* (Popular Action), which was created by Catholic students in 1962 and had transitioned to Maoism by 1968. Over the next ten years, the forces of this new non-PCB left came to be grouped into a semiformal organization, most famously in São Paulo, known as the *Oposição Sindical Metalúrgica* (Metalworkers' Union Opposition), whose discourse—if not its actual practice (Negro, 227)—tended to repudiate the entire legal structure of official unionism, including, for some, the validity of participating within these structures.

For Negro, the stoppages that occurred in ABC's auto plants in 1968 represent a moment in which one can detect anticipations of the dramatic events that followed in the late 1970s. The new oppositions in 1968 involved an "ebullient mixture" formed by the "return and recycling of older militants, the emergence of new activists, government hostility, a disbelief in officialdom, and the discrediting [*desgaste*] of union leaders" in power (299). "Beaten down and poorly represented, the workers were identifying themselves with oppositions who had a 'marked tendency to take problems into their own hands without consulting the unions'" (298). In the words of the U.S. consul, workers were moving into opposition "with or without their present leaders . . . [who were] seen as prisoners of a system that did not permit them to exercise any basic union function" (Negro, 299. Bourne, 39 offers similar claims but solely for the later New Unionism).

The year 1968 and its aftermath were marked by one final complexity: the anticommunist *democráticos* of the populist era had mutated into more than just a vocal and courageous Union Opposition (*Oposição Metalúrgica*), linked but not limited to the church and clan-

destine non-PCB leftist parties. There was also a second group, best exemplified by the metalworkers' union of São Bernardo do Campo. As its president from 1969 to 1975, Paulo Vidal shared with anti-PCB Leninist groups a desire not to "repeat the trade unionism of the CGT" while rejecting the disgraced sell-outs among the pre-1964 *democráticos* (Negro, 305, 236–37). His group favored a discourse of true, modern, and apolitical trade unionism while cautiously but clearly opposing the regime and keeping their distance from the threatening radicalism of their union opponents on the left (whether from the PCB, like Lula's brother, or the local Union Opposition) (Negro, 262, 267). Unlike Bourne's hostile characterization of Vidal's administration (Bourne, 27), Negro suggests that the theoretical goal was to build a powerful trade union institution that, while containing the left, might one day confront the employers and thus win gains for its members, something neither attempted nor achieved until the presidency of Vidal's successor, Lula.

It is here that we come to Negro's final and most profound contribution. Although it is easily missed in the text, *Linhas* argues that the earnest pursuit of such an objective would lead this group of *autênticos* to confront "dilemmas, impasses, and challenges that were not all that different from those suffered previously by [leftist] trade unionists who had been *cassados* [ousted by government intervention] and persecuted in 1964 and 1947" (267). Despite differences in generation, ideology, or trade union philosophy, honest trade unionists and labor activists drew similar conclusions from their encounter with a deeply flawed, government-controlled industrial relations system: to advance required them to stand up to the employers, the police, and the government, and they could do so only if they had established roots in the factories and support from the overwhelming mass of the workers.

In this most radical break with orthodox understandings, Negro convincingly argues for a fundamental similarity in strategy between the pre-1964 PCB-PTB left and the left that emerged under the remarkable leadership of the youthful Lula, a committed participant in the official union structure. Negro's discussion of the pre-1964 generation of activists and unionists truly captures the logic underlying Lula's actions after 1975. "If the union wanted to connect to the rank and file, it would be necessary to colonize the institution and give expression, based on the energy extracted from the unionization of the factories, to the conflicts and tensions negated by the corporativism" of the legal labor framework. This was to be the "privileged axis of transformation for Brazilian trade unionism" (Negro, 306). It was precisely what occurred—on a vast scale nationwide in the 1980s—under the banner of the New Unionism identified with Lula, which, for understandable political reasons, offered an entirely mistaken version of labor's past (Negro, 300, 311).



Even in the friendlier populist era, dedicated and honest activists and union leaders knew that without mobilizing worker support, their potential for institutional influence would always be dictated by the more powerful parties, “those who wrote the laws and gave orders to the police. It was better to equip oneself with the vigor of a social base” (Negro, 314). The goal was to free labor relations of the authoritarian encumbrances (*entulho autoritário*) that fostered bureaucratized leaderships, which in turn left unions at the mercy of the powerful (*reboqismo*) (216). Lula and the *autênticos* came to realize that “there was no way to make a genuine union movement without wrenching from employers the recognition of the union’s presence as something indispensable. . . . They could only escape . . . from the marginal position in which they found themselves if the workers rose up alongside them” (Negro, 276). As leader of the PT, Lula would take extend this fight for recognition and power into the realm of mass electoral politics, where organized workers had even less influence.

As events unfolded during three successive years of annual strikes, it was from the factories “that Vidal’s successor would extract the force needed to achieve emancipation from his tutor” by drawing on the emerging mass movement as “the great fountainhead of transforming energy and human and organizational resources” (Negro, 277, 73). While retaining Vidal’s support, Lula chose a path that included courting and incorporating leftist factory activists into the life of a union whose leader, despite a carefully cultivated ambiguity, was increasingly defined by his decided opposition to the workers’ enemies. Equally decisive was that the union “was progressively synthesizing and pacifying its internal struggles around the extraordinary and charismatic figure of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva” while “weaving a dense network of interpersonal relations” that minimized division on grounds of ideologies and strictly personal ambition (Negro, 311).

In briefly comparing these events to the early 1960s, Negro highlights “the incredible mobilizing force” achieved by the metalworkers in São Bernardo and Diadema in the late 1970s. In its most famous mass strikes of 125,000 workers in 1979 and 1980, the union also achieved the difficult fusion of “particular and general strikes” (Negro, 311) and the unification of community and trade union spheres. The latter was made possible by the decided support of the local Catholic bishop, Cláudio Hummes, who placed the institutional and human resources of the church at the strikers’ disposal, even in the face of the military occupation of the region in 1980.

In placing these dramatic events in historical perspective, *Linhas de montagem* offers an entirely different understanding of the “politicization of the daily life of the subaltern” that occurred as workers—at this time and in this particular place—consciously decided “the path of their

own lives” through a movement that aimed to universalize their demands both as a social class and as dignified, rights-bearing citizens (Negro, 315). “As the dust settled from the sweep of strikes” (three million struck nationwide in 1979), the leadership of an emerging working class threw its weight in favor of “the reformulation of the democratic political system, out of order since 1964. The nation was going to be changed, from one end to the other” (308). The 1980s would see the stormy consolidation of the radical New Unionism, including unprecedented national general strikes, while the new Workers’ Party founded by Lula in 1980 experienced steady growth. In the first postmilitary presidential election, in 1989, the PT’s unusual presidential candidate, a fourth-grade-educated union leader, experienced surprising success; and on his fourth attempt, in 2002, finally reached the presidency. He was reelected again in 2006, in both cases with 61 percent of the national second-round vote.

## THE BIOGRAPHICAL AND THE AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL

To win the presidency of any large country attracts biographers, all the more so given Lula’s “fairytale” ascent from the bottom of society to the very top of the political superstructure of one of the world’s most unequal countries. Yet the bulk of our semibiographical accounts focus disproportionately on Lula the candidate and politician. At best, they gesture toward his symbolic “representativeness” and emblematic status as celebrity strike leader (things about which most readers know little). Yet accounts by *petistas*, even with their familiarity with labor and radical leftist politics, confront a dilemma. How were they to bridge the gap between a simpler heroic past and the post-2002 reality, in which they reached the very highest level of political power? This placed Lula in a situation that their younger selves could never have imagined except in their daydreams of revolution.

This personal drama stands at the heart of the excellent interviews conducted by historians Marieta de Moraes Ferreira and Alexandre Fortes as part of a PT oral history project carried out by Rio’s Centro de Pesquisa e Documentação de História Contemporânea do Brasil (CPDOC) and the Fundação Perseu Abramo in São Paulo. The first volume of this beautifully produced, large-format book includes 12 extensive interviews with PT founders, along with 100 pages of annotations and a 10-page, 3-column index. The subjects include top officials and ministers in Lula’s government (Olívio Dutra, Luiz Dulci, Hamilton Pereira), elected PT senators, federal deputies, governors, and mayors (Paulo Rocha, Raul Pont, Benedita da Silva, Irma Passoni, and Djalma Bom, Lula’s union *companheiro* from São Bernardo), PT leaders at various levels (Apolonio de Carvalho, Avelino Ganzer), and two prominent

founders of influence but no official position (Antonio Cândido, Manoel da Conceição).

Taken together, these professionally executed interviews bring us face to face with those who helped to found the PT in 1980. They help us grasp how a socially representative, ideologically plural, and multi-generational left came together to construct a new and distinctive political party in a country as vast and diverse as Brazil. Rather than offering party pieties, these interviews with militants, members, and leaders highlight the liveliness of human storytelling in all its individuality. While interviewees balance episodes of terror, humor, and the joy of struggle, their accounts also provide vital evidence of the critical self-awareness that has allowed the PT to change and grow across three tumultuous decades. A truly splendid effort, this book greatly enriches our understanding of Brazilian society and politics in the past half-century.

Yet these volumes (one more is planned) will fascinate even those interested solely in the Brazilian presidency under Lula. Their relevance is enhanced because the interviews began just as the 2005 corruption crisis began to emerge and concluded the following year, but before Lula's triumphant reelection. Most interviewees freely address questions about the government's limited achievements or the swirling scandal that shook the PT and threatened Lula's government.

As a well-informed observer, Bourne, in his two-chapter treatment of the scandal and its aftermath, notes a peculiarity. Given the evidence that the Lula government seemed to have "lost touch with its roots and earlier ideals," he asks why, "in spite of a few high-profile defections, . . . the bulk of the party stayed loyal . . . [and] held together" (Bourne 152, 192). Beyond the favorable outcome that its membership was "not hurt numerically," he describes a "clear disconnect between the outrage felt by much of the media" and the mindset of Brazil's *petistas* and many of the men in the street (Bourne 193). To top it off, "the year 2006 saw a revival in Lula's fortunes. It was not immediately clear why this should be so," even with the Bolsa Família. "How was it that, phoenix-like, Lula would rise again?" (Bourne 115, 117).

Ferreira and Fortes address these questions in ways as varied as the backgrounds of the interviewees, who include trade unionists, nuns, intellectuals, peasants, and student leaders. The ex-minister Olívio Dutra offers a thorough and smart analysis of Lula's first term (Ferreira and Fortes, 129–35), while a former federal deputy from Pará, forced to renounce his seat in 2005, frankly discusses the "collective error that ended up exposing" PT leaders to obloquy for meeting their party responsibilities to "seek financial resources." The direct but delicate treatment of these questions by this still-loyal *petista* is fascinating (Ferreira and Fortes 153). For those sectors of the left that rightly emphasize the gap between what the government achieved and what the PT fought

for, the reflection of the internationally recognized literary critic Antonio Cândido is daunting in its realism. Given prevailing constraints, he would rather see such conformity to the structures of power “practiced by representatives of a party like the PT because there exists within it a ferment of social justice,” unlike the other contenders (Ferreira and Fortes 51).

Yet a black female *favelada* and a former peasant leader offer some of the most revealing commentary. The former senator and Rio governor Benedita da Silva addresses the question directly and personally on multiple levels. When she first saw Lula, she says, she thought he was “just like me, in his looks, his simplicity, his way of dressing; he even talks Portuguese badly just like me. . . . I have the greatest pride in that man. Hell, I want to be equal to him in intelligence, in forcefulness, in stick-to-itiveness [*garra*]” (Ferreira and Fortes 294, 299). After his final 2002 victory, she was so overcome that she cried and thanked God on the floor of her bathroom. “The election of Lula,” she declares without irony, “was a revolutionary act” because it meant the “little clever one [*damadinho*] reached the presidency of the Republic! . . . A worker, a man of the *povo* [common people]” in the presidency (Ferreira and Fortes 299, 302).

“Lula is the best president Brazil has ever had,” declares Manoel de Conceição. This peasant and one-time professional revolutionary describes Lula as “a very honest person sensitive to the problems” of working people, someone who can sit down and talk to them as equals, exchanging ideas and jokes. “We want change,” he declares in his 2006 interview, “but a president alone cannot change the path of this society. It requires millions of men, of women, young people, blacks and whites and yellows.” How can you expect change in four years in a country that has had five hundred years of slavery, during which “the big shots bossed the little people. We stopped being slaves, who worked to earn food and the whip,” to become a human commodity. Change does not come, he goes on, from occupying a mayor’s office or even the presidency; it has to be built over the long haul, from below, by the people themselves. And whatever the change is to be for the *povo*, it must be something “palpable. If not, *companheiro*, you’re stuck in intellectual discourse your whole life, and lying to the people by telling them something will change, but it doesn’t” (Ferreira and Fortes 75–76).

As for the ballyhooed scandals of 2005, Conceição hints that what’s up is that those on top of society hate Lula and what he represents. To which the other evangelical interviewed, Benedita da Silva, would say amen. “I never wanted to hold public office as much as during this crisis of the PT. Because, I wanted to respond . . . to these low blows, which can’t be left unanswered. And, when the PT is being beaten up like that . . . My god in heaven! They raped the PT” and no one on our side said

anything. The other side has “spent their entire lives saying that Lula was going to set fire to the country,” and we need to fight back, confront them, and shut them up (Ferreira and Fortes 302).

This stark sense of “us and them,” and the deep resentment and popular anger tied up with it, is what created the power that Lula exercised as a strike leader and that underlies his politics at even its most conciliatory. As he led ABC’s workers into strikes in which heads were broken and the threat of bloodshed loomed, Lula memorably and repeatedly declared, “No one will ever again doubt the workers’ capacity for struggle.” Or perhaps the time has come to modify this refrain—without losing its essence—to reflect this installment of the larger story: no one will ever again doubt the capacity of this worker, Lula, for struggle and success.

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