

Report on February 2004 IC meeting
by Steve B.

I am sending this report out by blind copying everyone. I am using overlapping lists of interested people (all members of the FI so far as I am aware). We do not yet have a formal basis for a collective discussion among all concerned comrades internationally. If anyone sends a comment, clarification, question, or alternative/supplementary report and asks me to circulate it to everyone who received this, I will do so.

The one agenda item I will report on dealt with Brazil.

1) Preliminary discussions

Before the meeting the comrades from the British ISG had submitted a resolution (appendix 1 below). In informal discussions with various members of the bureau, it appeared that there was general sentiment in favor of adopting a text along these lines.

There had also been some informal discussion, via email, among comrades from various sections who felt that while adoption of the British declaration would be a step forward, something stronger was more appropriate at this point. The OKDE (Greek section) adopted a resolution. (I do not have an electronic copy of this text. I hope the Greek comrades will send me the final draft and I will forward it to all who are receiving this report.) We had a formal meeting the day before the IC was to convene, attended by comrades from the USA, Germany, South Africa, Greece, and Ireland, where we agreed in principle to a set of motions that should be submitted—see “Motions on Brazil by Brown (USA—FIC), Sifogiorgakis(Greece), Thadeus(Germany—RSB), Daniel (Germany—RSB)” which are part of appendix 1 below. These included the two main political points that the OKDE wanted to put to the vote, so their resolution was circulated for comrades’ information, but not formally presented for a vote.

We also had consultation with two comrades from Brazil whom we hoped would be sympathetic, but who arrived too late to discuss the issues before the meeting formally began. Among the items translated and circulated to delegates was a draft tendency declaration (within the DS), signed by these two comrades, calling, among other things, for “build[ing] a new political instrument in time to contest the 2006 elections, one that can be seen as an alternative by those militants and social sectors disillusioned with the PT (and with the other left parties that support the Lula government. In other words, a party that aims to unite the entire socialist left.” Their text concludes: “We are in favor of a convergence between the socialist left of the PT and the recently launched movement for a new party .”

2) The formal debate

The discussions began with presentations by all three comrades present from Brazil, a report by the ISG delegate in favor of their resolutions, and a report by Daniel from the RSB for our motions. The general tone of the subsequent discussion was quite different

from what we heard a year ago during the world congress. No one prefaced their remarks this time with the idea that “of course we cannot make historical analogies.” A few comrades even suggested historical analogies. An overwhelming majority agreed that our presence in the PT government was not just a question for comrades in Brazil, but had important implications for the entire FI. Several raised their difficulty explaining the orientation of the DS to other activists in their countries when asked about it.

Some other important points of convergence emerged. There is now no disagreement whatsoever in the FI with a characterization of the PT government as a neo-liberal government. Lula and the PT leadership around him have made a definitive choice for an alliance with Brazilian and international capital. There is little or no real possibility to recapture the party’s traditional pro-socialist orientation.

Two particularly bright spots were the interventions by [X] from Brazil (along lines I probably do not need to recount for those receiving this email), and also one by a comrade from Sri Lanka, who explained in no uncertain terms that there were obvious parallels with the capitulation of the LSSP in the 1960s and its subsequent expulsion from the FI. The delegate from South Africa talked about the parallels between the evolution of the ANC and that of the PT.

However, even in this context it was obvious that problems remain. Only some comrades (it is difficult to give an actual weight to this) indicated that the correct framework for discussing the issue of governmental participation in Brazil cannot be one of “tactics,” limited to an individual country. Even fewer were willing to concede to us that there are questions of revolutionary principle involved. Others attempted to formulate their thoughts on the question of governmental participation in precisely the kind of “tactical” terms they either believe it to be themselves, or else think will be most persuasive to the majority of DS. And even among those who are inclined to be critical, there was not unanimity that it was appropriate for the IC to actually adopt a position. There was also still a significant layer (again hard to quantify, but it seemed to be a minority) who were willing to accept the assertion that this really was all a matter of tactics, a question simply for the Brazilian comrades to decide based on the conditions in their own country. Such comrades could not even comprehend why some of us thought the IC should adopt a position.

Still, from the debate, it seemed that most of the delegates would have favored some statement along the lines of the British proposal. However, the comrades of the bureau apparently came under considerable pressure from the representative of the DS majority. The idea began to circulate that if the IC adopted *any* resolution which could be interpreted as making a decision, in Amsterdam, about what the DS comrades should do, it would mean the end of any discussion and, essentially, a split in the international. In this context the bureau comrades put forward an apple-pie resolution, essentially calling for a discussion and for maintaining relations with all FI members in Brazil, saying nothing whatsoever about the political substance of the situation. When it became clear that there was not even agreement among the three Brazilians present regarding how to word a resolution on maintaining relations with all FI members in Brazil, that part of the

bureau resolution was dropped. All these comrades were then willing to submit to a vote was the motion to open a discussion.

There was also some pressure on us and the ISG delegate to withdraw our motions in the name of avoiding a premature split in the international, so that a discussion with the DS comrades could continue. The ISG chose to maintain its original text. We chose to introduce a new set of motions, to make it absolutely clear that we were not proposing to make any political decisions for the DS, merely to open a discussion with them in a serious and responsible way. (See “Revised Brazil Motions,” also in appendix 2 below.) The two comrades from Sri Lanka added their names to the revised motions, and played an active role in helping to draft them. The motivation we presented for proceeding in this way was that if adoption of a motion like this were to provoke a split by the Brazilian comrades, there is already no possibility whatsoever for a serious discussion with these comrades no matter what the IC decided to do, or not to do.

3) The outcome

In the end the bureau motion to open a discussion was adopted by an overwhelming margin (It may even have been unanimous. I’m not sure.) Then a motion to table all other motions on Brazil was also adopted. If I’m not mistaken, the only comrade voting against this motion who was not also an open supporter of either the ISG motion or a stronger ones, was the comrade from Austria. He later told me that he had opposed this maneuver on the basis that it violated democratic principles. If we wanted a vote on our motions we ought to be able to have one.

4) Final note—assessments, discussion , bureau

There were, as is normal, differing assessments of the meeting among those who were present. I will give my own here, which is decidedly mixed. The floor is, of course, open for comments by other comrades.

It is extremely unfortunate that, on a formal and official level, the IC was unable to adopt any political statement whatsoever with regard to Brazil, even one as mild as that proposed by the ISG. This will keep the gossip-mill churning among left forces internationally and give our comrades no tools whatsoever to respond to the claim that the FI is complicit in the unprincipled political course of DS in Brazil. Only those comrades who were present in the room for the IC discussion can assert otherwise, and purely verbal assurances lack credibility in this kind of situation.

At the same time, the number of comrades who felt that they had to make a clear political statement against the course being followed by DS was unprecedented (at least in the 25 years I have been attending leadership meetings). Also unprecedented was the sentiment in favor of adopting the ISG statement, even if most of the comrades retreated from this in the end. So while it is certainly too little and too late, at least events have moved a significant number of comrades in the right direction.

Another factor should not be underestimated: the commitment made by the comrades from Sri Lanka who represent an important section of the FI. Their contribution could have considerable weight in this discussion—both because of the size of their organization and its implantation in the class struggle, and also because of the history of similar kinds of problems in Sri Lanka in the 1960s. This is the first time these comrades have stepped out in a major way at an FI leadership meeting.

Finally, but by no means least importantly, we now have the ability to collaborate directly with some of our comrades in Brazil who also propose a different course than that being followed by the DS majority. So I left Amsterdam feeling considerably less isolated than I have after previous leadership meetings.

The proposed international discussion is a big opportunity. One question we need to take up is the manner in which we should pursue it. Already, at the IC meeting, comrades from Sri Lanka and South Africa pledged to generate articles talking about the links between what has happened in their countries and what seems to be happening in Brazil. Those of us who attended the meeting should think through some kind of collective submission. All of this will require a separate discussion, so for now I will leave my comments there.

Finally, one comrade from the German RSB was elected to the new bureau. Along with Alan from the ISG that gives us at least two who, we can be reasonably confident, will help to guarantee that this discussion is conducted in a way that generates a positive outcome for the FI.

Appendix 1:

The development of Socialist Democracy (DS) in Brazil has been of huge importance for the Fourth International. This is not only because its size makes it one of the largest sections of the international. Nor is it only because its implantation in the PT, in the trade unions and social movements, in local governments, in congress and in the World Social Forum process, make it one of the most influential sections the international has ever had. It is also because for over two decades DS has been at the forefront of the FI's strategic thinking and practice. Its conception of building the PT as a broad workers' party has been rich in lessons for other sections undertaking comparable projects in different circumstances. Its experiences of direct democracy and the participatory budgets have helped to put the FI and our programme for socialist democracy at the heart of the movement against neo-liberal globalisation.

For all these reasons it is the duty of the entire international to do whatever it can to support, defend and preserve our Brazilian section in the difficult situation which it now faces.

The international cannot and should not try to dictate from a distance the tactical choices that comrades make in a particular situation. Nevertheless we do have a responsibility to

try to help clarify the issues, to bring collective experience to bear in this kind of complex situation when the stakes are very high, to express an opinion in a frank and comradely way. Indeed there are times when a more detached view - once removed from the heat of the struggle - can add an important dimension to the debate. It is in this spirit that we express our concerns and fears to the comrades of the DS.

In spite of the drift to neo-liberalism which the PT has undergone in recent times, which has been compounded by its open alliance with sections of the bourgeoisie, the election of Lula at the end of 2002 raised enormous expectations in the working masses, not only in Brazil, but throughout Latin America and beyond. This victory was, and is, a major challenge, and a major opportunity for the working class, the revolutionary left in Brazil, and for the left inside the PT in particular. It was, and is, above all a major challenge, and opportunity, for the FI and for yourselves as our Brazilian section, who have been building the PT and preparing for such a situation for many years.

As the International Committee of the FI we want to express our support and solidarity to the comrades of the DS in this situation. We have expressed our solidarity through the campaign and petition against expulsion against comrade Heloisa and other PT deputies, which had some impact on the disciplinary process (although it did not stop it) and which attracted a reply from the PT leadership seeking to defend their position.

However, it seems to us that the direction taken by the Lula government is now clear. It is a coalition government with a neo-liberal agenda, implementing policies in the interests of the Brazilian bourgeoisie, and carrying out the requirements of multi-national capital. There are certainly contradictions, of a secondary character, reflecting both the working-class and popular base of the PT, as well as differences between different sections of the Brazilian ruling class and between these and imperialism. But there is no longer, if there ever was, any fundamental duality in the character of the government. Our fear is that your continuance in this government will do damage to your organisation and its relations with the most combative and important layers of the Brazilian working class and peasantry. Our fear is that at a critical point you will be held responsible, at least in part, for the policies of the government - particularly given the difficulties (legal difficulties and the direct repressive intervention by the judiciary and by regional state governments) which confront agrarian reform in particular.

Also, we must express our concern with what, from here, looks like a very dangerous contradiction. Inside the PT you have rightly opposed the pension reform and other neo-liberal counter-reforms, and you have participated in the strikes and mass demonstration against them, including in front of parliament. However, most DS members of parliament, with the support of the DS leadership itself, took the decision to vote in favour of the pension reforms, even though simultaneously denouncing them. We understand the tradition of collective responsibility in the PT for which the DS has rightly fought for over the years. However, no collective responsibility can be accepted for the neo-liberal programme of the Lula government. With the sincerity and frankness which we think must govern the relations between revolutionaries, we must say that this has

caused us great concern. We fail to see how this can be understood in the mass movement.

We believe a positive exit strategy from the government is now needed, one that can be seen by the mass movement not as a defeat but as a principled stand that puts DS at the very centre of the dispute over the direction taken by the PT and its government, as your conference resolution puts it. We also believe that such an exit from the government may go a long way towards preventing or healing the divisions that currently threaten DS.

We do not ignore the immense responsibilities which rest on you in this or the complexities with which you have had to grapple. But a defeat or a set-back for the revolutionary forces in Brazil at this time, and the most important factor in this is the DS itself, would not just be a defeat for the left but a set-back for all the workers and peasants in Brazil.

The DS clearly has the opportunity, and ability, not only to strengthen its own ranks but to form the vanguard of the revolutionary left in Brazil. In turn this can strengthen the left internationally and the FI in particular. Obviously this will not be easy. The choices are difficult. No doubt there will be deep differences. We recognise that these differences may require unconventional organisational arrangements. The ability of DS, and the FI, to cope with this situation will also be a test of our collective maturity. We believe the decision by the recent DS leadership meeting, not to take any action against those DS comrades taking part in the movement for a new party, is a positive first step in this direction.

Please accept the revolutionary greetings of the international committee, and rest assured that we will do all that we can to bring help and solidarity in the tasks which lay ahead of you. We do not argue that you leave the PT, of course, only that you recognise the dangers of being linked directly to a government which is now tied firmly to the social liberal agenda.

Appendix 2:

Motions on Brazil

by Brown (USA--FIC), Sifogiorgakis(Greece), Thadeus(Germany--RSB), Daniel (Germany--RSB)

1) a) The IC of the FI expresses its full solidarity with the votes and orientation of Heloisa Helena and some other PT parliamentarians (now expelled) against the neoliberal policies being pursued by the Lula government and leading circles of the PT.

b) We call upon the DS to withdraw all its cadres from their governmental posts and to focus efforts on continuing the organization and mobilization of the social resistance, the working class and the social movements. The DS needs to promote these aims both inside

and outside the PT, even if this leads to comrades being expelled from the PT by its leading group. At the same time we recognize that a decision to maintain a revolutionary current inside the PT at this time is a tactical judgment that can only be made by comrades on the scene.

2) We will send a delegation of comrades to Brazil to discuss the viewpoint of the IC with the leadership and membership of DS.

3) a) We open a literary International Discussion Bulletin, to be circulated electronically, for an exchange of views regarding the situation in Brazil and the political approach of revolutionaries to it. Contributions will be accepted from IC members and sections/sympathizing organizations. The first bulletin will contain resolutions/statements from DS and from the tendency called for by Heloisa Helena and Joao Machado. The IC will elect a commission to organize and regulate this discussion.

b) We encourage sections and sympathizing groups to organize their own discussions of this question, open to all members.

4) The international press in all languages shall publish:

a) motions 1 and 2 above (if approved by this IC meeting);

b) the platform of the Left Socialist Democratic Movement for a New Party and the interview with Senator Heloisa Helena from Jornal do Brazil of February 8, 2004.

Revised Brazil Motions

by Brown (USA--FIC), Sifogiorgakis(Greece), Thadeus(Germany--RSB), Daniel (Germany--RSB), Ranath (Sri Lanka), Bandara (Sri Lanka)

1) (Substitute for previous motion #1)

The IC expresses its collective desire to engage in an exchange of views with the comrades of the Brazilian DS regarding the situation in Brazil, their orientation toward the PT and the Lula government. We understand that all decisions on policy in Brazil belong to the DS. It is not the practice of the FI to dictate national political decisions from an "international center."

At the same time we believe it will help us in the process of discussion if we inform the comrades of DS that, based on the information we have available to us, the IC collectively wishes to express the following viewpoint: that DS is making a mistake (serious enough for us to express our grave concern) by participating in the Lula government. An orientation toward continuing to build a revolutionary current inside the PT should not be linked to participation in the government.

In order to best provide leadership to the developing movement against the neoliberal policies of the PT government, all of our comrades should withdraw from governmental posts. We appeal to the comrades of DS to develop a strategy for such a withdrawal, and to communicate it to us.

2) We will send a delegation of comrades to Brazil to discuss the viewpoint of the IC with the leadership and membership of DS.

Motion #3--withdrawn in favor of bureau motion to open a discussion..

4) The international press in all languages will publish the platform of the Left Socialist Democratic Movement for a New Party and the interview with Senator Heloisa Helena from Jornal do Brazil of February 8, 2004.