

SOLIDARITY

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Latin America

Brazilian labour becomes force to be reckoned with

Big Business

Corporate executives opt for workers' autonomy

South Yemen

Small coup. Not many dead



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Cover picture: Rising star, Lula - Brazil's charismatic labour leader - addresses the crowd outside the Sao Paulo State Assembly buildings, during his bid last year to become State Governor.
Photo: Juca Martins / Agencia F4

AS WE SEE IT

FRATRICIDE



South Yemen and the socialist dream

In a rare picture taken ten days into the bloody fighting, smoke billows over the port of Aden. While Europe's press limited its attention to the rescue of foreign nationals, socialists have commented even less. KEN WELLER asks the ominous question: Why?

IT IS NOTEWORTHY that, in Britain and elsewhere, many socialists find it necessary to keep silent over the misdeeds of repulsive regimes which use socialist rhetoric to justify themselves. The January coup in South Yemen, 'the only marxist-leninist state in the Arab

world', in which pro-Soviet president Ali Nasser Muhammed was overthrown by an even more pro-Soviet clique led by Abd El Fattah Ismail, libertarian socialists will find a case in point. The justification for the seizure of power was that Muhammed

was allegedly planning a premature St. Valentine's Day massacre of his political opponents; so Ismail and his comrades decided to get their retaliation in first. In the subsequent fighting over thirteen thousand people, most of them civilians, were killed. By way of comparison, about eight thousand have died in Nicaragua in the last four years, and thirteen hundred in South Africa since September 1984.

Fraternity

Among those killed were Ismail and several other leaders of the coup. The rebels seem to have been supported by the Soviet government, whose advisers play a leading part in the South Yemeni armed forces. The last act of the overthrown regime was to send a column of tanks to bombard the Soviet embassy.

Fratricidal struggles are nothing new in South Yemen. When the British and their client rulers were ejected in 1967, from what was then Aden and the Protectorates, there were two main - previously united - nationalist groups: the Front for the Liberation of South Yemen (FLOSY) and the National Liberation Front (NLF). While British troops were still in the process of withdrawing the NLF launched an assault on FLOSY and effectively wiped it out.

In 1969 the now ruling NLF had its first real coup, when the 'moderate' first president Qahtan Shaabi was ousted and replaced by the pro-Peking Salim Robai Ali. In 1978 Ali was himself ejected and executed along with his supporters. Both sides concerned with this January's coup participated in his downfall. Robai Ali was succeeded by Ismail, who himself resigned in 1980 for 'reasons of health' - a timeworn excuse which was justified by the fact that had he remained in office he would have been topped. His successor was Muhammed. Ismail was exiled to Moscow, whence he returned following Soviet pressure in 1985.

South Yemen, with a population of about 2,250,000, is one of the poorest countries on earth, with an annual average per-capita income of under \$400. Poor, that is, in all but the wherewithal, lavishly provided by the Soviet government, to kill its own population. It inherited from the British a relatively advanced industrial sector around Aden, with its oil refinery and bunkering facilities, combined with a pre-medieval set up in the East and West Protectorates which had been 'indirectly ruled' (i.e. left to rot), and were subdivided into innumerable mullah-ridden sultanates and sheikdoms where the principal means of settling disputes were tribal warfare and vendetta.

Liberty

Before consolidating its power the NLF had a phase of ultra-left window dressing. Promising the setting up of workers' and peasants' councils, their paper stated, "The great historical experience of the workers' councils is there to prove that the working class can govern themselves without difficulty, without bureaucracy, and without bourgeois competencies" (Ash Sharara [the Spark], Muhalla, March 1968, quoted in Arabia without Sultans by Fred Halliday, Penguin 1974).

Come the revolution, the NLF showed its true colours, establishing itself as the sole possessor of political power. It brutally purged the Adeni trade unions which had played a large part in forcing out the British, and smashed Islam as a political force (although female circumcision is still both legal and common - one has to make compromises). In 1971 the NLF established the Supreme People's Council, with 101 members, of whom 86 were appointed by the NLF and the remainder by the now governmental unions. Internal security is intense, with Amnesty International regularly reporting disappearances, executions and

systematic torture. Amnesty has listed a network of at least forty-five prisons and detention camps, the most infamous of which is Mujaskar al Fatah in Aden. In 1975 the regime enacted a draconian new state security law which even made it illegal to talk to foreigners.

Equality

The NLF, whose name was changed to the Yemeni Socialist Party in 1978, has about 25,000 members; that was, before the January massacres. After gaining power it has created a ramshackle copy of an Eastern European state during the Stalinist period, a major function of which is to provide jobs and privileges for the ruling elite. Members of the YSP not only have the best jobs but have privileged access to housing, which is in short supply, higher education abroad, scarce imported goods, and even discounts on public transport and entertainment.

Senior apparatchiks have more perks. Many of them have several houses and can use government property for private purposes; there have been cases of the sale of state land and houses for personal profit. Corruption is rife. About the only healthy sector of the economy is the black market. Small wonder, then, that a bitter joke circulates in Aden to the effect that "We used to have six sultans, now we've got forty-seven" referring respectively to the main rulers in the colonial period and the YSP's Central Committee.

Events in South Yemen raise several points of interest to libertarian socialists. What has happened there has been paralleled in several second-generation leninist paradises such as Cambodia, Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Angola, even Grenada. In each case, large chunks of the so-called socialist movement have eulogised them, suppressed awkward facts and manufactured favourable ones, and when they can no longer avoid

reality had a quick case of amnesia.

It would be a mistake to perceive the record of much of the 'left' in relation to such regimes as due simply to blind romanticism. What is wrong is their profoundly elitist and authoritarian idea of what socialism is all about, a concept reinforced by their own corporate self-interest. The authoritarian left in both composition and ideology represents a sector parasitic upon the state; they are the actual or potential beneficiaries of such 'socialist' regimes as that in South Yemen. In that sense the distance between Arabia and Lambeth, Liverpool and Greater London is not as far as at first appears.

In the past Solidarity opposed Pol Pot, Ho Chi Minh, Castro and their ilk. Today we do not support the governments of Libya or Nicaragua, or whoever now runs South Yemen. As the chickens come home to roost, those who have covered up the horrors must accept responsibility for the illusions they have sown and the subsequent rejection of the socialist movement following disillusionment. For us, whether in the First, Second or Third Worlds,

"Socialism is not just the common ownership and control of the means of production and distribution. It means equality, real freedom, the end of oppression based on restrictive male/female social roles, reciprocal recognition and a radical transformation in all human relationships. It is people's understanding of their environment and of themselves, their domination over their work and over such social institutions as they may need to create. These are not secondary aspects, which will automatically follow the expropriation of the old ruling class. On the contrary, they are essential parts of the whole process of social transformation, for without them no genuine social transformation will have taken place". (As We See It)

MANAGEMENT PSYCHOLOGY

Is anarchy boosting corporate profits?

American management psychologists have made a startling discovery: people work best when they are given the chance to organise themselves and believe in what they are doing. EVA BRICKMAN has been reading 'In Search of Excellence' and 'A Passion for Excellence', two recent books expounding the new management theory, and discovered a mad world in which IBM personnel sing 'We love you and know you have our welfare in your heart' to their chairman, corporations are 'mother institutions', and creative obsession is regarded as a healthy state. Libertarian ideas are being co-opted in the search for profit.

THOMAS J PETERS' In Search of Excellence was published in 1982, has sold five million copies worldwide, and is, according to its publishers "the most successful business book ever published". Peters' A Passion for Excellence is a follow-up published in 1985, and designed to incorporate feedback in a recycling of the previous book together with handy hints to managers on how to put the lessons into practice. Together they have become buzz-books, management bibles of the mid-eighties. These books are important not only for what they say but also because of the nature of their audience and their likely effect.

Their message is somewhat obscured by the lack of definition of the use of the word 'excellence' and the tendency to pack in anything that might just be relevant. It does mean that much interesting material pops up owing to the lack of self-censorship, but it also means that the books are

messy and unfocussed. They are also written in an 'American sincere' and occasionally overblown style which can make you want to throw up. However, scraping away the conceptual barnacles and stylistic seaweed, the point is this: during the recession of 1979-80, while many US companies had a hard time through poor performance and import competition, a number of large US companies continued to make large profits and expand markets. How did they do it? In Search of Excellence found that these companies, in varying proportions, were firstly very close to their customers and thus very aware of their market; secondly, able to get exceptional effort and commitment from their workforce; and thirdly, constantly innovative.

The authors obviously had problems making equivalences between actual firms. Some examples of 'excellent' firms were Hewlett-Packard, MacDonalds, and IBM. MacDonalds' operation is low-tech,



rule-ridden and rigorously controlled from the centre. IBM is sales- and service-led, modestly decentralised around individual sales operations as costs centres, high-tech, but not very innovative. Hewlett-Packard is highly decentralised (to the point of pluralism), highly innovative and close to customers only at the leading edge of their field.

Manage thyself!

The authors were thus obviously pushed to find an abstract formula which would allow them to put these companies into the same conceptual box. They say that all the successful companies had strong 'value systems', 'cultures' or 'elaborated socially integrating myths' other than purely financial gain. As we shall see, a good case can be made, but whether proved (or even provable) is another question.

The most interesting sections of these books are where (without

admitting it) the authors abandon the pretence of universality and talk about the smaller number of companies (not necessarily the technically innovative ones) which have adopted highly decentralised and autonomous forms of organisation. It is worth stringing together a number of quotes from these companies to give a taste of what is being said.

"The most commonly practised crime in industry today is a fundamental insensitivity towards personal dignity... people need to be 'empowered', not managed... The leader's role is to create a vision, not to kick someone in the ass. The role of the leader is a servant's role. It's supporting his people... The common wisdom is that managers have to learn to motivate people. Nonsense. Employees bring their own motivations. What people need from work is to be liberated, to be involved, to be accountable and to reach for their

potential... We don't manage people here, people manage themselves... ordinary people turned into vigorous, enthusiastic experimenters". (A Passion)

It is clear that these attitudes are underwritten by the authors. But before any of you libertarians out there get too simplistic about this it is worth seeing how they link these views back to the 'values' referred to earlier.

"We hear the following time and again: 'Many companies are now highly centralised and autocratic. You recommend, almost without caveat, radical decentralisation and greatly enhanced doses of autonomy. But isn't it true that some people aren't ready for it immediately? Or ever?'... the problem does exist... at Hewlett-Packard a division central manager says, 'We can only allow the apparent chaos because of the bone-deep belief we all share in superior product quality and the way in which people should be treated'. ... Johnson & Johnson may have the most radically autonomous units of any company we've investigated. At the same time it has as rigorous, regular and tightly articulated a value-review process as any we've observed - an annual, intense review of its credo called The Credo Challenge". (A Passion)

They also say: "There is then a natural order: values first, autonomous teams second..." It does not stretch the authors' meaning to restate this as follows: self-realisation and liberation at work can only come from a mutual respect and understanding and a democracy based on a shared set of values.

All this is very intriguing. Libertarians know that groups of people charged up and politically (or socially or religiously) committed can do wonders. It has provided a basic plank in arguments with the authoritarian left over the necessity for party-structures of the social-democratic or

leninist type. But the confidence trick involved in an invitation to this kind of commitment to the profits or advantage of institutions outside our influence or control seems so blatant we find it laughable. Of course we would prefer to work with people we like and with whom we can get things done. Of course we would prefer to work at tasks which give us a sense of personal worth. But we know from bitter personal experience that at work, to put it at its mildest, "the most commonly practised crime... is a fundamental insensitivity towards personal dignity". We would say that this is no accident. We would say that it stems from a class-based exploitative system. And we would find the project of value-driven decentralisation and autonomy within the present industrial system a bizarre form of capitalist maoism, doomed to failure.

So why the huge interest shown in Peters' books? There is no reason to dispute the facts presented. It is a simple fact that some firms are radically decentralised into small highly autonomous units with a strong esprit de corps (though there may well be other simple facts left out of account). It is as if the participatory democratic ideas, the trippy individualism and the readiness to believe in any trashy guru which marked the late sixties radical student movement has found a home in US management. But, of course, that's very possibly where many of those people did end up. Even given an ideologically prepared ground, however, it still seems an appalling risk for business to take. The socially dominant form of organisation in our society is the large centralised 'rational' bureaucracy, which is split into cost centres to monitor economic performance, divisionalised, perhaps, but not decentralised, and emphatically not composed of small autonomous sections.

I suggest that there are two reasons why the risk is one which

large organisations will increasingly take. The first is the internal contradictions of bureaucracy. The second, which is linked to the first, is the problem of innovation.

With internal contradictions we are on ground familiar to readers of Cornelius Castoriadis (see, for example, the slightly outdated Modern Capitalism and Revolution). Essentially, a centralised organisation needs to exclude people from decision-making to keep power at the centre, but also needs the participation of people in the organisation as a whole to keep the operation moving. This has mostly been applied to the participation and exclusion of the working class. It could be argued, however, that bureaucratic capitalism has 'solved' the problem of labour. To put this at its most contentious: a combination of deskilling, economic manipulation and automation has miniaturised and marginalised the proletariat (consider the present

state of the British printing industry). The working class has been excluded.

Whatever one's views on that proposition and its consequences (and I would like to see some discussion), the participation-exclusion contradiction is now at its most acute within the bureaucratic structures themselves. Only in the most routine tasks can the output of bureaucrats be objectively measured. The more judgment, initiative and energy is required as part of a job, the more the question of motivation arises. The basic motivation for energetic bureaucrats is careerism. But this represents no necessary commitment to the firm, its products or its customers except insofar as it makes people look good for their next move.

Peters and his co-authors argue that the 'rationalist' approach to management in the hands of accountants and organisation men cannot solve these problems. More, they argue that the sheer size of the organisations, their uniformity of method and their attitude to people as plug-in components encourages the mercenary approach or thumb-in-bum-and-mind-in-neutral time-serving.

Managed anxiety

Under these conditions 'good management practice' means cost-cutting, close monitoring of staff, slapping wrists and sacking the slackers and the faces that don't fit. As a result you can achieve the high pitch gulag-control of IBM. (As one IBMer put it to me: "There isn't one meeting that takes place within IBM that doesn't have its undertone of fear". What a way to live your life!). This approach certainly gets rid of the torpor. But it does nothing to stop the careerist war of each against all in the corporate structure, and makes the major features of autocratic bureaucratic centralism chronic lack of initiative and neurotic-compulsive behaviour.



Mathew Weir

We can put the participation-exclusion contradiction at the heart of bureaucracy like this: how do you simultaneously encourage the creative energy of the firm's employees and their collective commitment to the goals of the firm, and yet exclude them from the decision-making that they begin to think of as their collective or individual right?

Planning innovation

There is also the small question of innovation. This is the process that takes an idea and produces a new product for the market. Innovation is messy. Its origins are individualistic and the problem each innovation was designed to solve often bears little resemblance to the market it finds. Yet innovation provides products with high value-added properties (i.e. the market will bear a price considerably greater than the cost). Areas of business where there is low innovation and cost-cutting are the least profitable end of the market. So in addition to being rule-driven and flexible the modern commercial bureaucracy has to be innovative and individualistic. The commercial logic is impeccable, but the organisational contortion is huge. Peters suggests that he's cracked the problem.

The programme seems to be based on an acceptance of the consequences of the rules of bureaucracy internalised as values or ideology. Its major points are:

Cut down the size of sub-units to between fifty and hundred people to encourage family feeling (!).

Give these units a large measure of autonomy.

De-bureaucratise by slashing back HQ staff and posting senior staff to sub-units.

Give the chief executive officer the job of 'managing the values' for the organisation within the chosen mix of commitment to customers, developing the

employees, improving the product and innovating. His methods are reliance upon charisma and show-biz razzamataz.

Institute 'management by walking about', which appears to involve the manager in being a mixture of political commissar, cheer leader, psychotherapist, quality control spot checker, champion of the underdog and customer liason officer.

Encourage unofficial experimentation and internal competition in a spirit of 'guided autonomy'.

The authors cover their tails by suggesting that only companies founded by charismatic leaders or living the values for twenty years can pull off the trick. But their tone suggests that you can take that first step now. The financial rewards are also dangled, although it is all done in the best possible taste. For example, they tell us that HQ staff cuts of 75 per cent have gone along with threefold growth. Using a kind of 'institutionalisation of the unofficial', firms have been able to set up 'ninety-day' rules; any innovation has to be run from perception to prototype in ninety days or you do it in your own time (and employees do). This theme of drastically reducing development lead times is of huge commercial importance. One example given is a comparison between a team of 3750 doing badly and a team of 126 under budget and ahead of time.

The company as ideology

But while the corporate captains are rubbing their hands there are libertarian possibilities that should not be ignored. We take as a truism that unofficial, small scale, democratic, participatory groups work much better than your typical bureaucracy. But if the corporation has to go through so much grief to even approximate that happy state of affairs, why not abolish the corporation? The only difficulties facing small committed teams are communications and

capital. Why not mutually-funded co-ops on the Mondragon model, or, looking a little further ahead, socialisation of the banks?

So the autonomous small group struggling to be free from its imprisoning corporate structure opens up interesting possible future developments. But we ignore the fear of freedom at our peril. There are enough elements of the empty, nightmare quality of people's lives mentioned almost unawares in passing in these books to make us really take notice. We have to face the possibility that the reach-me-down values of these corporations may be filling a deep psychological need. It is remarked of one company (3M), "The brain-washed members of an extremist political sect are no more conformist in their central beliefs". Its chairman indicates why: "Companies like 3M become a sort of community centre for employees... This has happened because the community in which people live has become so mobile it is no longer an outlet for the individual. The schools are no longer a social centre for the family. The churches have lost their drawing power as social-family centres. With the breakdown of these traditional structures certain companies have filled the void. They have become sort of mother institutions but have maintained their spirit of entrepreneurship at the same time" (In Search).

The consequences are invasive in the extreme. "By signing up for the project you agreed to do whatever was necessary for success. You agreed to forsake, if necessary, family, hobbies and friends - if you had any of these left... From a manager's point of view, the practical virtues... were manifold. Labour was no longer coerced. Labour volunteered" (A Passion, quoted from Tracy Kidder's The Soul of a New Machine).

So now creative obsession is no longer to be the privilege of the

individual but merely a part of the management plan. The authors say at one point, "So strong is the need for meaning... that most people will yield a fair degree of latitude or freedom to institutions that give it to them".

Jerking labour's chain

We should neither over- nor underestimate the devilish cunning of the big corporations. Many of the ideas here will be taken up, but, I suggest, it will be done for the most part piecemeal and ineptly. The response of the workforce is likely to be that outlined in an impromptu speech by one of the authors which is quoted in one of these bizarre yet quirkily honest books:

"I come from the so-called humanised/humanistic Silicon Valley. I'm here to tell you that in six out of seven companies that I visit in that valley, Mecca of 21st Century Management, the average worker would not attend his or her next quality circle meeting if it was the last day on earth. They see it for exactly what it is: another way to jerk labour's chain" (A Passion).

Finally, let us note the authors' warning against 'insincere' applications of their ideas: "Every device we suggest is doomed to be useless unless applied with integrity. Worse than useless, most of these devices, used without integrity, will expose you as a hypocrite of the first order... Paint out the executive parking spots, but treat your people with contempt, and you'll find you stand convicted of a kind of fraud" (A Passion).

Thomas J. Peters and Robert H. Waterman
In Search of Excellence
Harper and Row, 1982 £6.50

Tom Peters and Nancy Austin
A Passion for Excellence
Collins, 1985 £12.95

LATIN AMERICA

Workers' party grows fast in Brazil

In the mid seventies it was fashionable to talk about the economic miracle being achieved by Brazil's military rulers. Now, in the mid eighties, some see signs of a possible political miracle - the emergence of a popular political party which sides with the working class. NICK TERDRE files his second report from Brazil.

GROWING DISILLUSIONMENT in Brazil with the country's new civilian regime could, over the next year or two, thrust the Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT) - the Workers' Party - not only into the political limelight but possibly into a historic role.

This prospect is the result both of developments in society at large and of the appropriateness of the PT's own policies to the times. The PT is the only party identified with the oppressed working classes and the more radical sectors of the middle class, and it is benefitting from a growing hunger among these sectors for the type of politics it represents.

When state government elections come up in November, the possibility of a PT victory in Sao Paulo, though not great, cannot be ruled out. The consequences of such a victory - in Latin America's largest industrial centre - would be enormous, and could well represent a sufficient threat to the bourgeoisie to provoke a military coup.

In 1985, after twenty-one years of military oppression, civilian government was finally restored in Brazil. The end of military rule

Political opposites: Left, Luis Ignacio da Silva - Lula - the leader of the radical PT party. Popular and charismatic, he is difficult to heckle. Right, Janio Quadros, leading member of the PTB party. A former President of Brazil, he defeated Lula for State Governorship of Sao Paulo in 1985. At the microphone Quadros is a virulently anti-communist demagogue.



was clinched by a fantastic movement which exploded onto the streets in 1984 and left no doubt about the widespread desire in society for profound changes - democratic instead of authoritarian government, the country's resources for its people and not international creditors, a decent standard of living for the masses instead of luxuries for the rich, land for rural workers and peasants, and an end to violence and speculation.

While the movement was genuinely popular, the leadership was taken over by politicians from the opposition parties, in particular the Party of the Brazilian Democratic Movement (PMDB). At the same time, as the military's days in power were clearly numbered, mass desertions occurred from the ruling party set up to support the government. It is politicians from these two groups who now form the new government, maintaining intact a political system and a choice of

economic policies designed to benefit primarily the bourgeoisie.

On taking office in March 1985, the government enjoyed a honeymoon period when all problems could still be blamed on the military. The honeymoon having now ended, and the problems still remaining, the government's inability - or lack of desire - to institute far-reaching changes becomes daily more evident.

The elections for mayor in the state capitals last November provided an important pointer to the popularity of the new government. For the ruling alliance - dominated by PMDB in partnership with the smaller Liberal Front Party (PFL), a right-wing group - the result was little short of a disaster. In the major political centres PMDB-PFL lost to populist groups. In Rio de Janeiro and Porto Alegre, victory went to the the Democratic Labour Party (PDT) headed by 'socialist' Leonal Brizola. In Sao Paulo the winning



candidate was the authoritarian and right-wing former President Janio Quadros of the Brazilian Labour Party (PTB). (In Brazil a party's name usually symbolises what it doesn't stand for).

Principled stand pays off

Meanwhile the PT unexpectedly won Fortaleza in the north-east, and would have won in Goinania in the centre-west but for electoral fraud by PMDB members. In Sao Paulo, Quadros' victory was blamed on the PT, which had refused to subordinate itself to a 'left-liberal' alliance under PMDB. Together the two parties would easily have won. But the PT is now gathering the fruits of its principled stance on such issues. It has always refused the pragmatic vote and the idea that under present circumstances its own interests - and those of the workers - should be set aside in favour of supporting the 'left' or the 'national bourgeoisie'. For the same reason it incurred widespread public hostility when, alone of all the parties, it refused to participate in the indirect presidential elections organised by the military regime in 1985.

Since the mayoral elections, PMDB, in reality a ragbag of groups covering a wide range of the political spectrum, has begun to fragment into its constituent parts. The PT, on the other hand, has continued to grow, and is soon to launch a recruitment campaign to capitalise on its popularity.

The PT's current wave of success is by no means due only to its record in election campaigns and in the country's representative bodies. So far it has remained true to its roots - it was born in the historic strike in the Sao Palo industrial suburbs in 1978 which brought to an end ten years of quiescence in the factories enforced by machine guns and torture chambers. Since then it has stood by its commitment to support workers in struggle. It is the only political party to show its presence consistently in

strikes and land conflicts. Though urban in origin, it is now strong in many rural areas. Several dozen party militants have already lost their lives at the hands of gunmen employed by the landowners. In 1982, when recession and job-letting were at a peak, it shocked conventional political opinion by organising an unemployed workers' camp outside the Sao Paulo state assembly. The party is currently refusing to go along with the government's desperate pleas to agree a social pact to control prices and wages, backed by a ban on strikes. Its strong line on these issues does not mean that it refuses inflexibly to negotiate with other parties. Although refusing the government's social pact, it has proposed a national agreement to fix minimum wage levels for a temporary period, but on condition that the right of particular groups of workers to organise their own wage campaigns, backed by strikes, is not impeded.

Meanwhile, the party, together with the central trade union organisation, the CUT, set up by it, are continuing to develop a campaign in favour of a forty-hour week (the average worked in Brazil is over forty-eight hours), three-monthly instead of six-monthly wage increases (necessary because the annual rate of inflation is over 230 per cent), land reform, a realistic level for the minimum wage (the PT is calling for a level over three times that set by the government) and a price freeze on basic goods. To back their demands the PT and CUT are preparing the ground for an eventual general strike.

Internal flaws

It would be ridiculous, however, to suggest that the PT has no flaws or that it never makes mistakes. Its weaknesses lie mainly in its internal makeup. It is a curious mixture of the trade unionists who founded it, left-wing intellectuals and far-left groups practising deep entryism. The latter include both

trotskyists such as the Convergencia Socialista and Democracia Socialista, and the Partido Revolucionario Comunista (PCR), a breakaway from the maoist Partido Comunista do Brasil (PC do B). The PT at least had the good fortune that when the end of the military regime was in sight, most of the marxist groups - PC do B, the Moscow-aligned Partido Comunista Brasileira and other smaller offshoots - decided that "objective circumstances" required them to go and militate inside the PMDB: to strengthen the forces of the liberal bourgeoisie.

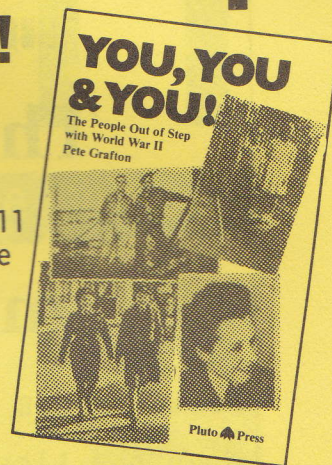
The groups that have joined the PT, however, have at times caused substantial problems, and been responsible for the decision of no small number of other members to leave. These groups do not have sufficient support to exercise a decisive influence within the PT, although in some areas they dominate some local branches. A certain amount of politicking also takes part in other sections of the party. Lula, the party president and best-known member, is acknowledged to have great charisma. This functions outside the party, but not so much inside. Although an excellent speaker, Lula is not much of an ideas man, and perhaps would not have maintained his prominent role in the party had he not been adept at making the right kind of alliance at the right kind of time, sometimes with one or other of the entrust groups. The level of politicking, and the disruptive activities of the entrusts, have so far not caused serious damage to the party's activities in the field. There is no guarantee, however, that they might not do so at some future date.

With a bit of luck, or judicious action on the part of those conscious of the problem, this danger will be averted. For the time being the PT is the most positive force in Brazil, and it will be a pity if internal problems screw up its chance to make a little - or a lot - of history.

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LIBERTARIAN EDUCATION

There is a spark in the magazine

From the LIB ED collective

When the Libertarian Education collective read your recent review of our magazine we were both disappointed and angry. Adverse comment we can take but destructive criticism from supposed comrades is something else. Your review reads more like a judgment from on high than a careful constructive assessment from alongside. The reviewer decided that they didn't like our politics but didn't let the reader in on how they had arrived at that judgment. Did the reviewer read the four point statement outlining our perspective on page two? What did they think of it? Which articles seemed most politically flawed and in what way? Which statements and conclusions did they find unacceptable and for what reasons? If we have been found guilty of political unreliability, can we at least hear the evidence?

The simplest way to give readers some opportunity to evaluate Lib Ed for themselves is to print our position-statement. It reads as follows:

This magazine is against authority.

Schools and colleges use their authority to define, to grade and to discipline, in order to transform the learners into the sort of 'products' that the state demands.

In contrast, libertarian education sees education as

liberation. The learner, young or old, is the best judge of what they should learn next. In our struggle to make sense out of life, the things we most need to learn are the things we most want to learn. The liberated learner controls the process - no longer the victim.

We don't pretend to have all the answers. Lib Ed magazine is a forum for everyone who is interested in the liberation of learning.

Now these points together with the magazine's articles have prompted a lot of criticism (see the letters page of issue two!) but fortunately it has been more focussed and constructive than that offered by your review.

If we are serious about forming the structure of the New Society within the shell of the old we will need to offer each other more trust, support and indeed more solidarity, than your review exemplified.

Yours sincerely

TROTSKYISM

Getting the flavour right

From DONALD ROOUM, London

Quick footnote to Ian Pirie's review of 'Quite Right Mr. Trotsky!': the description of Trotskyist parties as the 57 varieties did not originate with the old Solidarity cartoon; I first heard it used by Philip Sansom at Speakers' Corner in 1950.

Best wishes,