

SINGER, André. Os sentidos do Lulismo: reforma gradual e pacto conservador [The meaning of Lulism: gradual reform and the conservative pact]. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2012, 276 p.

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The relevance of the Lulist phenomenon lies at the core of André Singer's work, "Os sentidos do Lulismo: reforma gradual e pacto conservador" [The meaning of Lulism: gradual reform and the conservative pact], which conducts an investigative synthesis of studies conducted by the author. The work examines the rise of Lulism through electoral realignment, i.e., the convergence of leadership and class factions (the subproletariat) during the 2006 presidential election. Generally speaking, Lulism refers to a state that provides for the poorest populations without opposing the established order.

The form of Lulism analysed in this study is premised on a contradiction between conservation and change in terms of governmental economic achievement for the purpose of justifying change without opposing the existing order. Government achievements are sustained throughout the chapters through the use of analytical instruments that are related to electoral realignment and to changes that are implemented within the party organisation. This argument, though well-suited to the concept of Lulism, is limited in that it interprets this phenomenon as something that is partially detached from party competition. Perhaps the Worker's Party (Partido dos Trabalhadores – PT) may be fully incorporated into the analysis and made even more complex if an analytical view of political representation were applied.

The work may thus have consequently sought to understand the "meaning of the PT" without alluding to that which the social sciences literature defines as "*petismo*" (PT policies). From an analytical perspective, the concept of electoral realignment may have included the dynamics of PT political representation in recent years, i.e.,

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representational changes resulting in an electoral realignment, as described earlier. While the author defines Lulism as a comprehensive phenomenon of electoral realignment that emerged in 2006, it may be crucial to recognise the institutional character of the mobilised decisions in terms of political representation from party forces and in terms of the complexities of electoral competition.

While the party issue is discussed in one of the chapters that focuses on the two “souls” of the PT, doubts are raised regarding the meaning of Lulism. This doubt is especially evident when the author’s definition is compared to possible readings of the phenomenon based on institutional processes of electoral competition and the political representation of government policy actions. In this sense, it is possible to conclude that subnational policy “mirrors” electoral nationalism and party competition with Lulism. This phenomenon may imply the existence of a more complex and multidimensional relationship between intermediate and latent political actors in the realm of electoral realignment.

The first chapter, which focuses on the social and ideological roots of Lulism, describes the trajectory of PT’s relationship to the social strata of higher income and education. This dynamic remained in place during the elections of 1989 to 2002, during which the party received strong electoral support from the highest strata while resistance was met from the lower income working classes who defended change vis-a-vis the conservation of order.

Lula’s candidacies promoted conciliation with the lower strata, resulting in the rise of Lulism in 2006, which was characterised by polarisation between the rich and powerful, rather than the presence of a right-left dyad. The author defines one aspect of Lulism as a departure from the PT. This perspective characterises the methodological orientation of the work. However, doubts are raised with respect to the real distinction between Lulism and the immediate consequences of change within the PT framework, i.e., which of the author’s definitions exhibited antagonism between Lulism and *petismo*.

The work highlights the procedural shift that occurred in the midst of the 2002 PT campaign as a result of essential changes that occurred within the PT during the 1990s that led to the party’s first

presidential victory. This local electoral success and strong level of party preference among voters - in addition to the strong presence of organised civil society groups - analytically increased the need to rethink theoretical-methodological choices regarding the personalisation of “Lulism”.

In the second chapter, the author analytically confronts the two “souls” that currently compose the PT: “Sion” (*Colégio Sion*, where the PT was founded in 1980, the author’s reference to the pragmatic compromises the established order at the time of the party’s creation), which represents the anti-capitalist position that the party defended at the time of its creation, and “Anhembi” (referring to the São Paulo convention centre where the party frequently hosts events, which is a capitalist symbol of business and ideologically represents diverse party positions), which, upon renouncing its anti-capitalist commitments, represents by conviction the assimilation of common liberal conceptions that are antagonistic to the ideological spectrum that the party had adopted upon its foundation.

In the author’s words, the “Anhembi” soul demonstrated a

pragmatic disposition that occupied the opposite end of Sion old purism. It was not a gesture of relaxation but rather a true commitment to traditional Brazilian pragmatism, which was once denied explicitly in the party’s flag. Under the guise of adjustments made during the 2002 election period, a revolution was underway, inspiring left PT supporters to join the spirit of Sion (p. 99).

To the author, as the “Anhembi” soul removed anti-capitalist party factions, it introduced more factions that were willing to accept capital, thereby resulting in the development of a permanent party line.

Analyses that examine previous changes to the PT use data that are related to party preference and to the ideological views of PT supporters. Both analytical dimensions refer to the party’s popularisation, i.e., the fact that this change of party line found its social foundation in the sub-proletariat. The PT was affected through a reiteration of dominant positions on the issue of the “Anhembi” soul, although the Lula government partly adopted goals of the “Sion” soul. According

to the author, this illustrates that the spirit of the “Anhembi”, although dominant, did not suppress that of “Sion”. Rather, “they coexist side by side, as if one wished to ignore the existence of the other” (p. 119).

Overall, Lula’s two terms formed a contradictory synthesis between two souls that compose the PT today, in a similar way as those policies that were adopted by the government during the two terms, which simultaneously benefited economic interests and the needs of the poorest populations. The possible conjunction between these antagonistic interests within PT assumes a paradoxical character, and in our view, this is particularly true of the PT’s current political representation, which is amplified as much by past interests regarding the soul of “Sion” as present interest in the “Anhembi” soul.

The clash between the two PT souls and the effective shift in PT electoral support reaffirm the need to understand, in terms of political representation, shifts that occurred in the relationship between the PT and major social movements and organised segments of civil society that were influential within the party until 2002. Hence, it may perhaps be necessary to include this relationship as a third analytical dimension that focuses on how organised groups continue to support the party while faced with those changes discussed in the work. This would verify the extent to which the party has disconnected from those active citizens that favour new relationships with groups that sympathise with the spirit of “Anhembi”.

The third chapter seeks to analyse the material and political grounding of Lulist agendas adopted by the two presidential administrations. The chapter discusses the government’s political choices surrounding the achievement of a “Rooseveltian dream”, i.e., the process behind the emergence of a Brazilian New Deal¹⁷.

The analytical approach is designed to examine the antithetical character of the “political economy of Lulism”, which guaranteed the rapid decline of monetary poverty, but a more slow decline of inequality, thus expressing contradictions that arise while arbitrating different

¹⁷ In reference to policies that form the “New Deal” implemented by the United States government of Franklin Roosevelt, which aimed to overcome the effects of the Great Depression.

interests. Lulism's overall success is attributable to an ability to balance conflicting proposals while functioning as a judge for the various classes.

Examinations of Lulism should perhaps consider relevant changes in political representation that manifested during this period, thereby enabling an interpretation of new forms of organised civil society mobilisation. While this mobilisation united segments of civil society in favour of the political goals of Lulism, it also benefited governmental efforts to encourage civil society to participate in conferences, advisory council meetings, and other arenas of political dialogue. Hence, the author limits his analysis by discarding the possibility to understand political principles of Lulism. Our disagreement with the author on this matter is premised on the fact that limited structured conflict arbitration occurs within civil society. If Lulism thus immobilises civil society, it will not enjoy the political autonomy to guide civil society actions.

Hence, rather than promoting an argument surrounding the demobilisation of society, the author may have concluded that Lulism may have maintained different forms of mobilisation tied to political choices to ensure the success of class coalitions. In other words, demobilisation realised through Lulism may be perceived as a strategy for generating capital under the direction of the PT together with social movements influenced by the party.

The ways in which choices were coordinated through the prevention of agendas of interest demonstrate how well PT programmatic tensions were balanced in the face of arbitrated coexistence between the spirit of "Sion" and that of "Anhembi". It is possible to extrapolate from the work's results that consequences of localised tension in the struggle between the two PT souls had a considerable influence on how the organisation was viewed and on the mobilisation of segments of civil society under the context of Lulism. Hence, the relationship between parties and movements may have warranted more attention in the work through an examination of two interconnected research questions concerned with the implications of Lulism for both civil and political society.

Finally, the fourth chapter develops an argumentative basis for identifying the actions of Lulism as manifestations of "weak

reformism” that differ from the series of PT proposals regarding the “Sion”, which promoted proposals for “strong reformism” in programmatic compromises until the 1990s. Thus, Lulism had not advocated an exclusion of “strong reformism”. Rather, the dilution of reformism occurred due to a gradual process of undeniable change within Brazil.

The author understands that while certain policies developed by Lula enacted “strong reformism”, this was conducted in a homeopathic fashion without confrontation. The author warns that one must not confuse this process with “strong reformism” itself or with neoliberalism as it was analysed throughout the chapter based on essential data. Rather, the author argues that Lulism is characterised by actions of “weak reformism” that do not exclude minor actions of “strong reformism” and which do not place secular capital interests at risk. The “final note” described in this chapter must be noted here. The author describes the class character of Lulism, i.e., the structure of Brazilian capitalism under Lulism, particularly with regards to the constitutive character of the Brazilian working class of the current century, which is determined by the power of ongoing reformism. The argument focuses on the fact that while “weak” in nature, this form of reformism promotes structural changes as long as it is implemented, given that Lulism shifts class character in favour of another dyad of rich and poor.

Recent social and political manifestations of Lulism are analysed in the “final note” with respect to the Party of Brazilian Social Democracy’s (Partido da Social Democracia Brasileira - PSDB) adherence to Lulism:

although it continues, even if by exclusion, the party of the bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie, the PSDB, will not be able to clearly vocalise its nucleus as long as Lulist realignment endures. It must present itself as the ethical perpetuator of weak reformism (p. 214-215).

This facet of the PSDB observed by the author can be identified in other parties that support the government, e.g., formative movements of new Lulist party forces external to the PT (or in opposition to the PT, but in favour of Lulism). The author’s central argument defends

the notion that the development of popular capitalism as a Lulist paradigm leaves spaces of anti-capitalism vacant in the face of the limited support for minor parties such as the Socialism and Freedom Party (Partido Socialismo e Liberdade - PSOL) and United Socialist Workers' Party (Partido Socialista dos Trabalhadores Unificado – PSTU). Hence, Lulism partly defends capital interests at its core.

The author's analysis conveys a partial collapse of the Left based on notions that it had both lost and won against Lulism. The work leaves the reader to question: regarding Lulism as a strategy used by the Brazilian Left, will the Left define this political movement as a "moral" rule or as a contingency of a political project?

For the author, the form of capitalist hegemony that Lulism represents is combined with an overall decline of the Left as a consequence of the spread of neoliberalism. The loss of Leftist space has resulted in the development of a combination of "lower reach" political projects, which programmatically weaken values adopted during the twentieth century. In this sense, the factors that led to the rise of Lulism are not differentiated from the limits of the Left at the beginning of the 21st century. The "final note" of the chapter contemplates this issue and recognises that despite the occurrence of depolarisation between left and right, new processes of polarisation between the PT and PSDB exhibited a different character given the predominance of "weak reformism". This marked a new era and introduced contradictions to the Brazilian case that were more significant relative to the period that preceded that of Lulism. For the author, "the PSDB will need to convince the 'old middle class' that the upward movement of the 'new middle class' is positive and that it is decreasing, for electoral reasons, existing forms of social polarisation" (p. 215). The PSDB will have to present itself as the leader of a "popular transformism".

Given the numerous changes that have occurred in Brazilian politics over time, it is impossible to deal conclusively with its themes, which have articulated a vast theoretical framework through an even broader empirical design. This is especially true with respect to methodological pitfalls, which for some haunt the foundation of the work of a researcher who simultaneously lives as both an object and a subject.

While this work will undoubtedly continue to be mandatory reading in several academic fields, it will also prove valuable to common readers who seek an in-depth understanding of the current Brazilian political system. This work will thus offer reflections on the future of democracy and on interpretative lines of Brazilian politics, i.e., the foundations of 21st century Brazilian society.