

## Brazil's Left Parties Are Old and Bureaucratized, Warns MST's Leader

Written by Nilton Viana  
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"It is time for the government to ally with the people or pay the bill in the future." This is one of the evaluations of João Pedro Stédile, from the national coordination of the MST (Landless Movement) on demonstrations across the country. According to him, there is an urban crisis installed in Brazilian cities, provoked by this stage of finance capitalism.

"People are living a hell in the big cities, losing three, four hours a day in traffic when they could be with family, studying or having cultural activities," he says.

For the MST leader, the reduction of transit fares mattered a lot to all the people and this was the appeal of the Free Pass Movement, which knew how to summon for the mobilization in the name of the interests of the people.

In this interview, Stédile talks about the character of these mobilizations, and makes a call: we must be aware of the nature of these demonstrations and we must all go to the streets to contest for the hearts and minds and to politicize this youth which has no experience of the class struggle. "The young are fed up with the methods of commercial bourgeois politics," he notes.

And he warns: the most serious target was that the institutional left parties, all of which have been formed by these methods. They are aged and bureaucratized. Popular forces and leftist parties need to put all their energies to go to the street, as is happening, in every city, in every demonstration, an ongoing ideological debate on the struggle of class interests. "We need to explain to the people who are their main enemies."

**What is your analysis of the recent protests which have been shaking Brazil in the last few weeks? What is the economic basis for them to happen?**

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There are many assessments for the reasons that led to these demonstrations. I agree with the views of Professor Erminia Maricato, who is our greatest expert on urban issues and has acted in the Ministry of the Cities during Olívio Dutra's [Ed. a founder of the Workers Party, mayor of Porto Alegre, governor of Rio Grande de Sul and Minister of Cities] administration.

She defends the thesis that there is an urban crisis in Brazilian cities caused by the current stage of financial capitalism. There has been enormous speculation on the property market which raised rents and the price of land by 150% in the last three years. Capital has financed car sales, without government control, in order to send money abroad, causing chaos in our traffic.

In the last ten years, there was no investment in public transport. The housing program "My Home, My Life" pushed the poor into the outskirts of the city, without any infra-structure. All that has generated a structural crises in which people live in hell, in big cities, wasting three, four hours a day in traffic, when they could be with their family, studying or involved in cultural activities.

Add to that the awful quality of public services in special health care, and even education, from elementary school, secondary school where students leave without being able to write a composition. And college education has been turned into shops selling diplomas in installments, which is where 70% of all college students are.

### **What happened in political terms?**

The fifteen years of neoliberalism added to the last ten years of a class composition government rendered politics solely hostage of capital interests. Political parties have become old in their practices and became mere acronyms agglutinating, in its large majority, opportunists aspiring to rise up in public positions or fight over public resources or serve their own personal interests.

The youth born after the "Diretas Já" [direct presidential elections now], did not have the opportunity to participate in politics. Today, in order to dispute any position, for example, for councilor [city council], you need to have more than one million reais [approximately 2 reais to the dollar]; a deputy costs around ten million.

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Capitalists pay and later politicians follow orders. Young people are fed up with this bourgeois way of doing politics, strictly commercial. But what is even more serious was the fact that political parties from the institutional left, all of them, adapted to those methods. And, therefore, provoked a sharp aversion to the way political parties act.

The youth is not apolitical, quite the opposite, so much so that they took politics to the streets, even without being aware of its meaning. But they are saying that they can't take it anymore watching these political practices on TV, which kidnapped people's vote, based on lies and manipulation.

### **And why did these demonstrations only break out now?**

Probably it was a sum of several factors of mass psychology nature, rather than a planned political decision. Added to that the climate mentioned above, plus accusations of over billing for the construction of the stadiums, which the people felt was an insult. Let's look at some facts.

Globo TV received from the state government and the city of Rio, 20 million reais of public money, to organize a two hour "little show" for the draw of the games of the Confederation Cup. The stadium in Brasília cost R\$ 1.4 billion and there are no public buses in the city!

It is an explicit dictatorship imposed by FIFA which all governments submitted to. The reopening of Maracanã [Rio de Janeiro's main stadium] was a slap on the face of the Brazilian people. The pictures were clear, in the greatest temple of the world's football there was not a single black or mixed race person! And the rise of bus fares was the last drop. It was only a spark to ignite a generalized feeling of revolt, indignation. Just as well the youth woke up.

### **Why have the working class not taken to the streets yet?**

It is true the working class did not go to the streets yet. Those who are on the streets are the children from the middle classes, the low middle classes, and also some young people which

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Andre Singer would call sub-proletariat, who study and work at the service sector, who experienced an improvement in their consumption status, but want to be heard.

The reduction of the bus fare was very important for people as a whole and that is where the Free Fare Movement got it right, they were able to call for mobilizations according to the interests of the people. And the people supported the demonstrations and that was expressed by the popularity index of the youth, especially when they were repressed.

The working class takes longer to move, but when they move, they affect capital directly. Something that has not happened yet. I think that the organizations that are mediating with the working classes have not yet understood the moment and are still a bit shy. But the class, as a class is prepared to struggle, I think.

Look, the number of strikes for better salaries has already recovered to the patterns of the 80's. I think it is just a matter of time, and if the mediations strike the right banners to motivate the class to move. In the last few days, one can see that in some smaller cities and in the outskirts of large cities demonstrations are already starting to have very clear demands. That is very important.

### **And what about you from the MST and peasants, who have not moved yet?**

It is true. In the capitals where we have settlements and family farmers nearby, we are already participating. I am also witness that we were very well received with our red flag and our demand for Agrarian Reform and healthy and cheap foods for everyone. I think in the next few weeks there will be a greater accession, including demonstrations from peasants on roads and counties in the countryside. Our militancy is eager to join the fight and mobilize. I hope they also move soon.

### **What is your opinion about the source of the violence that is happening in some demonstrations?**

First of all let's relativize things. The bourgeoisie through its TV channels is using the tactics of

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scarring people, showing only images of troublemakers and riots. They are a minority and are insignificant compared to the thousands of people who have mobilized. The right is only interested in planting in the imaginary of the population that it is only a mess, and at the end if there is chaos, blame the government and demand the presence of the army. I hope the government will not make the mistake of calling the national guard and the army to repress the demonstrations. That is exactly what the right dreams about!

The way the military police intervenes is provoking those scenes of violence. There are organized right wing groups with instructions to provoke and loot. In São Paulo there are fascist groups acting. In Rio de Janeiro there are organized militias protecting the conservative politicians. And of course, there is also the lumpen that turn up in every popular mobilization, be it in stadiums, carnival, even in church celebrations, trying to take some personal benefits.

**Is there a class struggle on the streets then or is it only the youth manifesting their indignation?**

Of course there is class struggle on the streets. Even though it is still concentrated in ideological debate. What is even more serious, the actual mobilized youth, due to its class origins, is not aware that is participating in ideological struggle. Look they are doing politics in its best possible way, on the streets.

And then, they write in their posters: we are against political parties and politics? That is why the messages in the posters have been so diffuse. It is happening in every city, each demonstration, a permanent ideological debate of class interests. Young people are being fought for by the ideas of the right and the left. By capitalists and by the working class.

**What are the objectives of the right and its proposals?**

The dominant class, capitalists and their ideological spokespersons who show up on TV every day, have a major objective: to wear out as much as possible the government of Dilma, to weaken the organization of the working class, to weaken the proposals for structural changes in Brazilian society and to win the elections of 2014, in order to recompose a total hegemony in the command of the Brazilian state, which is now in dispute.

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In order to reach those objectives they are still feeling their way, alternating tactics. Sometimes they provoke violence, to take the focus from the objectives of the youth. Other times they use the posters of the youth to carry their messages. For example, the demonstration on Saturday , however small, in São Paulo, was totally manipulated by right wing sectors who guided it only for the struggle against PEC 37[Ed. PEC 37 is a constitutional amendment to limit the ability to investigate corrupt officials, rejected by Congress on June 26, 2013], with the same posters ... same calls.

Certainly the majority of young people don't even know what that is all about. And it is a secondary theme for the working class, but the right is trying to raise the flags of morality, as was done with UDN [Ed. União Democrática Nacional – National Democratic Union – political party formed to oppose Getúlio Vargas and generally supported the 1964 military coup] in the past.

I have seen in social networks controlled by the right that their flags, besides PEC 37 are: for Renan to leave the Senate; CPI [Parliamentary Commission of Investigation] or transparency of the expenditures of the Cup; to declare corruption as a heinous crime and the end of the special forum for politicians. Now, fascist groups rehearse "OUT DILMA" and petition for impeachment.

Luckily those banners have nothing to do with the living conditions of the masses, even if they can be manipulated by the media. Objectively speaking, they are a shot in the foot. After all, it is the Brazilian bourgeoisie, its entrepreneurs and politicians who are the greatest practitioners of corruption and the ones who corrupt. Who appropriated the enormous cost of the World Cup? Globo TV and construction companies!

### **What are the challenges for the working class, popular organizations and political parties?**

There are many challenges. First of all we must keep in mind the nature of those demonstrations, and we must all go to the streets, to fight for hearts and minds in order to politicize this youth who has no experience with class struggle.

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Second, the working class must move. Go to the streets, protest in the factories, fields and construction sites, as Gerald Vandré [Brazilian singer who opposed the military dictatorship and was exiled] would say. Raise their demands to solve concrete class problems, in economic and political terms.

We need to take the initiative and guide the debate in society and demand the approval of the project to reduce the working hours per week to 40 hours; demand priority of public investments in health, education and agrarian reform. To do so the government must cut interest rates and transfer resources from the primary surplus, those R\$ 200 billion that every year go to 20,000 rich, rentiers, creditors of an internal debt that never existed, and switch those resources for productive and social investments.

We need to approve an urgent system to be in place in the next elections, a robust political reform, which at least institutes the exclusive public financing of campaigns. The right to revoke mandates and self-called popular referendums.

We need a tax reform and the return of ICMs [tax over the circulation of commodities] for primary exports, penalizing the wealth of the rich, in order to ease taxes on the poor, who are the ones who pay more. We need the government to stop oil auctions and all privatizing concessions of minerals and other public areas. There is no point in applying the sum of oil royalties in education, if these royalties represent only 8% of the oil revenues, and the other 92% will go to transnational corporations that will have the oil in the auctions!

We need a structural urban reform, and a return to prioritizing zero tariff and quality public transport. It has been proven that it is not expensive, nor difficult to have free transport for the masses of the capitals. And control real estate speculation.

Finally, we need to use this opportunity and approve the project of the national conference of communication, broadly representative, for the democratization of the media. In order to end the monopoly of Globo, and for the people and their popular organizations to have broad access to communicate, creating their own media, with public resources. I have heard from several young people who are networking the marches, which perhaps is the only common call that unifies all of them: Down with the Globo monopoly!

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But for these calls to have resonance in society and pressure the government and politicians, it will only happen if the working class moves.

**You, from social movements, submitted a letter asking for a meeting with President Dilma [Rousseff] and she accepted and replied on TV, what are you talking to her?**

Hopefully this audience will actually happen. Then, certainly social movements will indicate their young representatives who took to the streets, and who will bring to her the platform that I have described, I hope she will be sensible enough to listen to the young people.

**What should the government do now?**

I hope the government will have the sensibility and intelligence to take advantage of this support, this call that comes from the streets, which is only a synthesis of a diffuse conscience in society, that it is time to change. And change in favor of the people. To do that the government needs to face the dominant class, in all aspects.

To face the bourgeoisie rentier, transferring interest payments to investments in areas that will solve the problems of the people. To promote political and tax reforms immediately. To put forward the approval of the democratization project for the media. To create mechanisms for substantial investments in public transport, towards a zero fare. To accelerate the agrarian reform and a plan for the production of healthy foods for the internal market.

To assure the immediate application of 10% of the GDP in public resources for education in all levels, from kindergarten in large cities, to quality primary education and culminating in the universalization of the access of the youth to public university.

Without that, there will be disappointment and the government will hand over to the right the initiative of the calls, which will take over our demonstrations, aiming at wearing out the government until the 2014 elections. It is time for the government to ally to the people, or else it will pay the bill in the future.



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### **What perspectives those demonstrations can bring to the country in the next few months?**

Everything is an open question at the moment. Because the youth and the masses are in contention. That is why the popular forces must summon all their energies to take to the streets. Demonstrate, carry their flags of struggle for the reforms that really matter to people.

Because the right will do the same and bring their flags, conservative, backward, criminalizing and stigmatizing the ideas of social change. We are right in the middle of an ideological battle, nobody knows what the result will be. In each city, each demonstration, we will have to dispute for hearts and minds. And those who are left out, will be out of history.

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