

Secco, L., 2012, *História do PT 1978-2010 (3ª Edição)*, Ateliê Editorial, Cotia (São Paulo), pp. 316.

The potential reader of this brief review deserves an explanation of the acronym used in the title of the book as, outside of Brazil and Latin America, it probably is not instantly recognizable. The late British historian Eric Hobsbawm, in his autobiography *Interesting Times. A Twentieth-Century Life* (Abacus, London 2002, p. 382), has observed with regard to Latin America:

None of the political experiments I have watched from near or far since the Cuban Revolution has made much lasting difference. Only two have looked as though they might, but both are too recent for judgement. The first, which must warm the cockles of all old red hearts, is the national rise, since its foundation in 1980, of the Workers' Party (Partido dos Trabalhadores or PT) in Brazil whose leader and presidential candidate 'Lula' (Luis Inácio da Silva) is probably the only industrial worker at the head of any Labour Party anywhere.

(The present reviewer has left the above spelling of Lula's name used by Hobsbawm; maybe the curious reader should know that the second 'political experiment' he mentions – and with much less enthusiasm – were the consequences of the demise of the Mexican Partido Revolucionario Institucional after its 71 years in power.) Hence the subject of the book authored by Lincoln Secco (born 1969; a professor of contemporary history at the prestigious Universidade de São Paulo) is the Brazilian left-wing Workers' Party, which since 2003 has governed the country with a rather firm control of the executive branch and a somewhat more feeble grip of the legislative branch due to the fractious coalitions.

That quote from Hobsbawm, however, may serve another purpose too. In a certain way it neatly sums up the general outline of the academic tasks chosen by Secco: to write a history of a fairly new political movement, which is literally developing in front of the researcher's eyes; to write a history of the party and not a biography of its leader, even one as charismatic and emblematic as Lula; to establish – even if provisionally and cautiously due to the lack of historical distance (understood here, in the words of its contestant Mark Salber Phillips,

in its most common meaning i.e. “a position of detached observation made possible by the passage of time”) – if the party has indeed fulfilled Hobsbawm’s hopes of any lasting difference. It has to be noted, too, that Secco’s project is one that is pioneering. As the author himself states in the introduction (p. 22), professional historians have very rarely focused their attention on the PT and until the publication of his book no comprehensive history of this party has been available.

Already in the above mentioned introduction, Secco makes a number of very important points regarding some of the essential qualities of the PT. For example, the origins of its internal richness (and source of the future internal skirmishes) expressed by various ‘tendências’, certainly can be traced back to the groups or movements responsible for the establishment of the party at the turn of the 80s (Secco enlists six such ‘sources’; among them: the so-called new syndicalism concentrated in the ABC industrial region of the state of São Paulo; politicians of the already organized Movimento Democrático Brasileiro, but also – who were quite influential up to a certain point – groups of Trotskyists). He also asks the historically and theoretically important question as to whether the PT, as it is often stated, is indeed the first modern mass political party in Brazil. His remarks regarding the membership and varied activities of the Partido Comunista Brasileiro certainly put the explicitness of such opinions into a context. On the other hand, he clearly sees the pioneerism of the PT in other fields, as in his opinion, during its existence of over 30 years, the party has changed Brazilian society and politics (though he would probably add: we still do not know for sure if this change is a temporary or a definite one) by providing a political platform for the lower social strata and by channeling the energy and inventiveness of the civil society.

In order to present the complicated history of the PT Secco divides his narration into four general parts (‘phases’ in his own nomenclature), i.e. Formação (1978-1983), Oposição social (1984-1989), Oposição parlamentar (1990-2002) and Partido de Governo (2003-2010). Alas, the space provided to the present reviewer does not allow him to discuss extensively the author’s detailed and insightful considerations. As a consequence, only the general outline of the basic problems/contradictions/paradoxes of each of those periods can be mentioned.

According to Secco, already in the first phase of the PT's evolution it was a multi-class party with influential roles performed by the better educated members of its original middle-class members. It was also a party with a very uneven presence in the country. Certainly it was most visible and active in the most populous and industrialized states of São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Minas Gerais and Rio Grande do Sul. It was internally plural, albeit far from coherent. Nevertheless it could be described as trying to maintain an equal distance from the western-style social democracy and bureaucratic communist parties of the Eastern Bloc. Some of the features mentioned by Secco can be qualified as ever-present in the history of the PT. Probably the most important aspect of the second period was the emergence of the dominant and reformist 'Articulação' tendency in the party, as this was the beginning of a lengthy process which steered the party towards its current, notably more center-left (or in certain respects – like monetary policy, for instance – even centrist), ideological position. In the following twelve years the party evolved into a more professionalized and less militant political force. It also introduced the so called PED (Processo de Eleição Direita), which in spite of some controversies, has allowed the PT to deservedly present itself as a showcase of internal democracy in Brazilian politics. The final and ongoing period of the party's history is certainly marred by numerous corruption scandals, nevertheless Secco – and it is hard to disagree with him – is of the opinion that it was capable not only of winning power but also of using it for introducing imaginative and original policies ('Bolsa Família' being the foremost example) which responded to at least some of the most deeply rooted social problems of Brazil.

In the opinion of the present reviewer, Lincoln Secco has written a very fine book about one of the most important (on a global scale!) political parties of the late 20th and early 21st centuries. He is certainly sympathetic to the PT's plight, however he never loses his academic level-headedness. Analyzing the activities of such colorful political figures as Lula or José Dirceu, it would be easy to fall into the trap of personalization and subsequently psychologization of history. Luckily Secco avoids such pitfalls and never ceases to place his considered narration in the firm context of Brazil's class, social and economic reality.

In the quotation above Eric Hobsbawm talks about 'lasting difference.' Like every good historian, Secco is cautious enough not to give too explicit answers with regard to the questions about the PT's legacy as it is still being played out. As a result, the present reviewer is eagerly awaiting future editions of this important book, as with each of them the author would be a step closer to more definite conclusions.

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