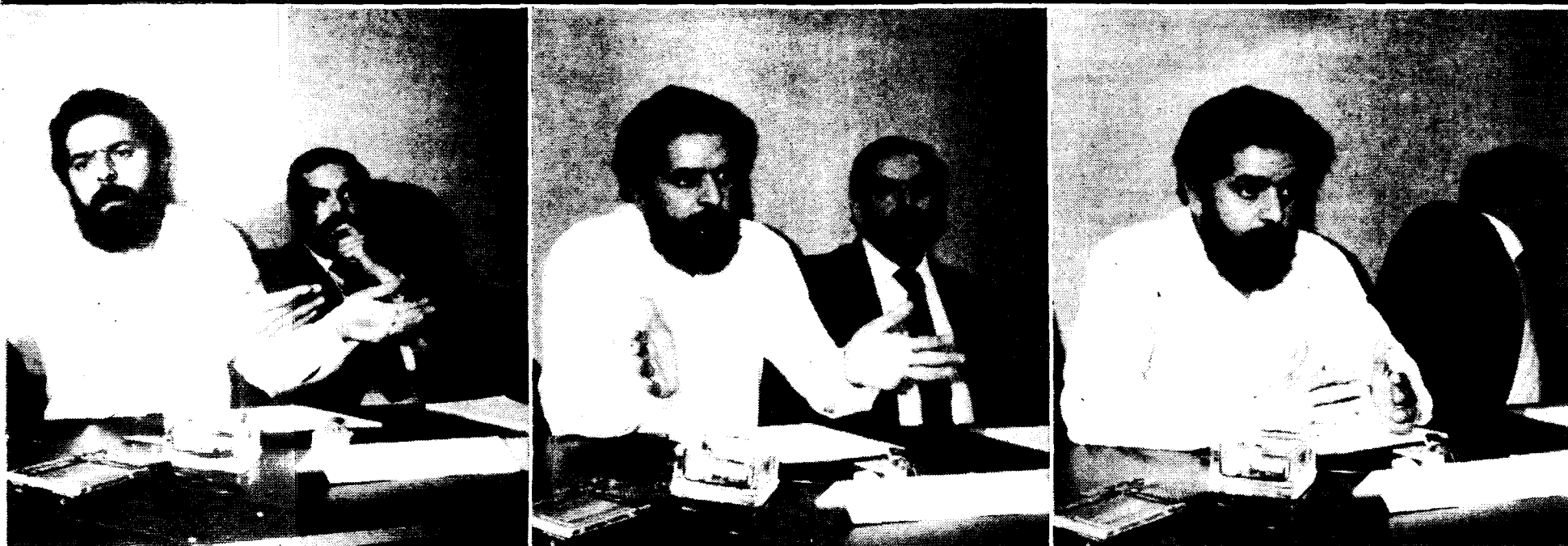


# IN THE WORLD



Lula (left), seen here with French union official Jacques Chereque, now feels that international ties are crucial for the Brazilian unions.

## LATIN AMERICA

# Brazil cracks down on labor activism

By Diana Johnstone

PARIS

**T**HEY CALL HIM "O LULA" AND in Brazil he is as popular as a soccer star. But when he is cheered in Vila Euclides stadium, army helicopters buzz menacingly overhead and machine guns scan the crowd. He is Luis Ignacio da Silva, at 35 the president of the Sao Bernardo metalworkers union and chairman of the fledgling *Partido dos Trabalhadores* (Workers Party, P.T.). To put an end to these activities Brazil's military regime is dropping its liberalizing pretenses long enough to haul Lula and a dozen of his colleagues before a military court next week.

They are accused of endangering "national security." How? By inciting the metalworkers of the "ABC" (Santo Andre, Sao Bernardo and Sao Caetano) industrial triangle outside Sao Paulo to strike. Which they did, massively and peacefully, for 41 days last spring.

The strike called April 1, 1980, was so well prepared at meetings involving thousands of workers that "no pickets were necessary," exults Lula. "So there was no possibility of picketline violence. The government itself caused the violence, to prevent free bargaining between labor and management." Heavily armed troops occupied the ABC region. Labor leaders were plucked from their homes, from church—one was arrested in the mayor's office—and thrown in jail. After a month, their lawyers got them out, but failed to get the case against them dropped or transferred to a civilian court.

Thus on Feb. 23, the 15 union leaders come before a military tribunal on charges of "incitement to collective disobedience." If convicted, they could be sentenced to from two to 12 years in prison. But whatever the sentence, anyone convicted for "national security" offenses is barred from running for any political or union office.

Lula and his 11 co-defendants are not only union leaders but also belong to the leadership of the newly-formed Workers Party. The trial thus aims at both crippling the metalworkers and lopping off the leadership of a political party that does not fit into the government's scheme of controlled pluralism.

The harassment did not stop there. Last July 21, during peasant struggles in the north Brazilian state of Acre, the president of the farm worker's union, Wilson Souza Plubet, who was also a local P.T. leader, was assassinated. Lula and P.T. secretary general Jacobo Bittar, president of the Sao Paulo petroleum

workers, went to the protest meeting that followed. When a farm administrator was murdered, the government police called Lula and Bittar as witnesses and then charged them with the crime. This blatantly trumped-up charge also keeps them from their normal union and political work.

Aware that Lula and Bittar are not really dangerous criminals seeking to flee the country, Brazilian authorities finally granted them temporary passports in time to attend ceremonies marking the first anniversary of the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua. Then the two toured Europe to call attention to the Feb. 23 trial that Lula calls "the most important political event since the Brazilian military regime began its much-heralded 'opening' in 1978."

In Paris as guest of the French Democratic Labor Confederation (CFDT), Lula stressed that the "opening" does not involve the working class or the labor movement. The Brazilian regime, under General Joao Baptista Figueiredo, former head of military intelligence, has "opened up" political life for the upper classes with a 1979 law allowing new political parties to be legalized—but only if they can gather signatures of one-tenth of the current members of Congress or else prove they have local branches in one-fifth of the municipalities of nine states. This reform was designed to fragment the opposition, which had been forced to unite in the only legally allowed opposition party, the Brazilian Democratic Movement (MDB) after the MDB began to make life in Congress difficult for the government party, ARENA. The P.T. is not a breakoff from the MDB but a new creation of labor militants. It has grown fast but not yet met the standards for legalization.

Lula stresses that the "opening" is "very elitist, not intended for the whole of society." It may be a "liberalization" but it is definitely not a "democratization."

### Talking strategy with Walesa.

Luis Ignacio da Silva was born in 1945 in the northeastern state of Pernambuco in a family of poor farm laborers who, like so many others from that depressed region, moved to the sprawling suburbs of Sao Paulo looking for work. The young da Silva worked a lathe in the Villares steel plant of Sao Bernardo. He was elected metalworkers secretary in 1973 and president two years later.

Disclosures in 1977 that the government had been falsifying the price index to hold down wages were followed by a series of major strikes for higher pay. The problems raised by these strikes con-

vinced union leaders of the need for a workers party, which they founded last July with da Silva as chairman. By this time he had become O Lula, hero of the great ABC strikes of 1979 and 1980. Solid and placid-looking behind his fuzzy beard, he offered the huge crowds—up to 100,000—in Vila Euclides stadium the choice: "Die with our heads down, or die with our heads held high."

In Rome last month, Lula met Lech Walesa. The Brazilian had complained last August that in his country, fierce critics of the Sao Bernardo strike "can't find praise enough to lavish on the strikes in Poland." And yet, "the Poles are asking for the same things we are: freedom to organize their own union, the right to strike, the 40-hour work week."

At first, Lula differed with Walesa on one thing: political involvement. "Walesa thinks he should stay out of politics," Lula said in Paris. "We discussed that in Italy and concluded that even if he says he stays out of politics, in practice he has practically overthrown his government. The main thing is for workers' rights to be respected, whatever the system. Now, I think if Walesa were in Brazil, he'd do what we're doing, and if we were in Pol-

and, we'd do like him. At our meeting in Rome, we decided to keep in touch, because we realized that we Brazilians know little about Poland and vice versa."

Lula says he is a recent convert to the idea of international solidarity. "For a long time, I refused to travel to other countries, because I thought the special problems of Brazilian workers were a matter of national conditions. But now I have been realizing that the problems of Brazilian workers often originate in other countries, where multinationals have their headquarters."

Now he thinks two things are of fundamental importance: first, to find out about European unions—"and we discover that we are 100 years behind"—and second, to talk with European labor leaders about building real international solidarity.

### The lessons of Europe.

The trip to Europe has shown him what freedom is. There is no comparison, he said, between the Brazilian political "opening" and that in Spain (though in Brazil the comparison is often made). "In Spain, when they started the open-

*Continued on page 10*

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Noam Chomsky

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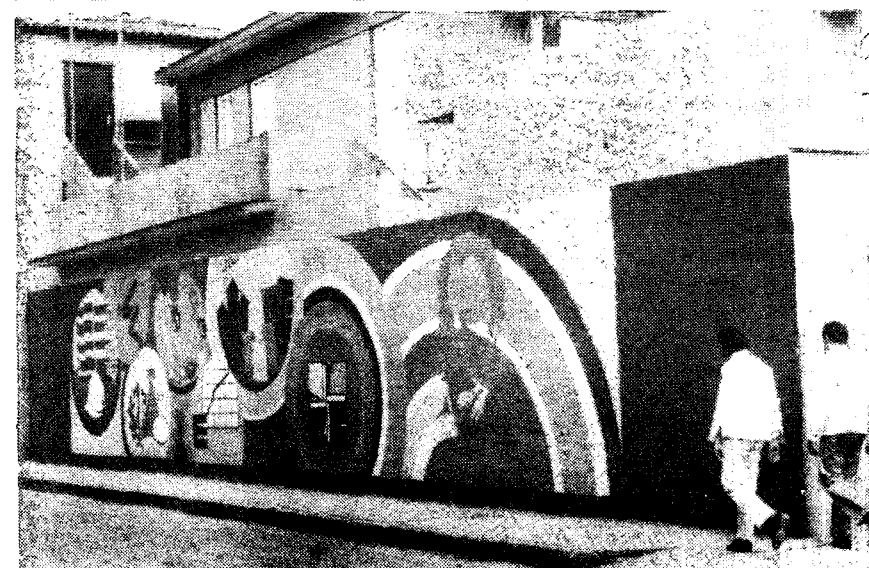
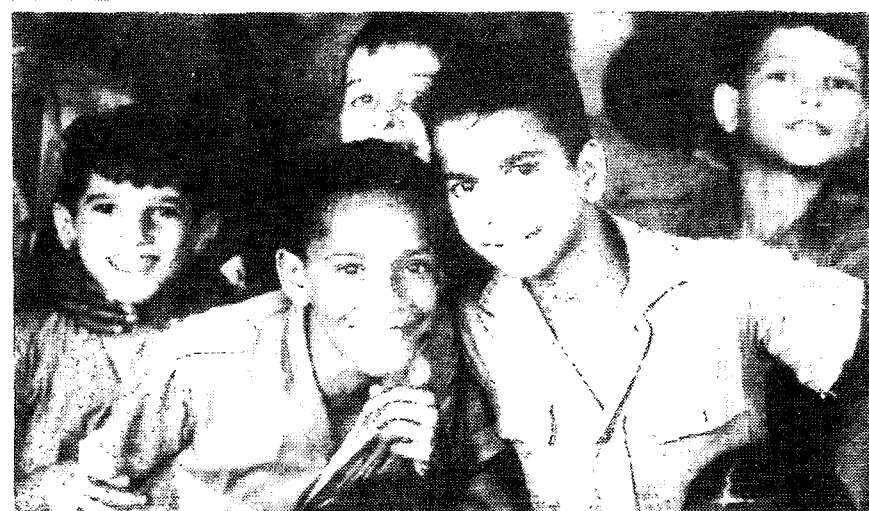
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