

Lula Rising

By Kevin Y. Kim

Two thousand miles north of that bustling hub of Brazilian business, São Paulo, lies a dusty hamlet of 26,000 peasants. Nestled in the country's drought-prone northeast, an area said to contain Latin America's largest concentration of rural poverty, Caetés is a town

Lula and the Workers Party in Brazil

By Sue Branford and Bernardo Kucinski

The New Press

144 pages, \$22.95

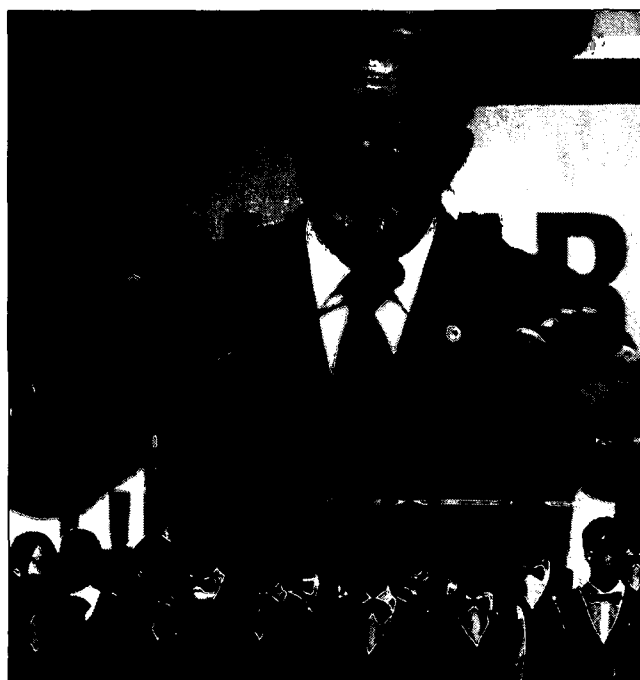
where nearly everyone is—or claims to be—related to Brazil's new president, widely hailed as globalization's greatest hope in decades. Here, where less than a fifth of the population has clean tap water, Luiz Inácio "Lula" da Silva was born amid yucca farmers and mothers struggling to send their children to bed with enough rice in their bellies to sleep peacefully.

Published on the one-year anniversary of Brazil's first working-class president's tenure, *Lula and the Workers Party in Brazil* isn't blind to the unchanged poverty in Caetés and thousands of villages like it. While refraining from castigating Lula for betraying his early radicalism, the authors, veteran BBC and *Guardian* correspondents Sue Branford and Bernardo Kucinski, qualify the oft-recited claim that Lula could help construct "a real alternative to neo-liberalism" with the question on every progressive's mind: Can the Workers' Party (PT) government still achieve this, or has its reinvention as a moderate party to win the presidency compromised its difficult destiny?

The answer *Lula* posits is that it's too early to tell. It's not a good sign that after one year Lula's happiest constituents are the international financiers whose dogmatic policies have mired Latin America's economies since the 1980s. In 2003, Brazilian interest rates shot up, budgets got slashed, and inflation was forced down in

what's become a familiar IMF recipe for prompt foreign debt repayment and sluggish economic growth at home. Little wonder, then, that some PT rank-and-file began wondering aloud whether Lula had sold his soul to big capital.

But has he? Branford and Kucinski report Lula tossed and turned many sleepless nights before enacting the austerity program the IMF and foreign creditors demanded. His predecessor handed Lula a colossal public debt reminiscent of Latin America's irresponsible governments of yore, who drew the IMF to the region in the first place. In the lead up to Lula's October 2002 election, collapsing investor confidence and a rapidly spiral-



Lula speaking at the opening ceremony of a sugar-exporting terminal.

ing *real* presaged a speculative attack on Brazil's currency, threatening to cripple the PT government before it began.

Pragmatism ruled the start of Lula's administration. The official rationale held that "initial austerity policies could always be changed later into expansionist ones." Lula, whom Kucinski interviewed for the book, speaks of the decision in parable, a style endearing him to the millions of Brazilian poor:

We moved into a house that was in shambles. We have to put in a new roof and a new floor. We have to redecorate and then we have to adapt the house to our needs. This all takes time.

The time for grandstanding is over, Lula states. Instead, he tells Kucinski, "it is the time for doing." What emerges from *Lula's* collage of biographical profiles, economic statistics and political analyses is the portrait of a leader who has given up left-wing rabble-rousing for consensus-building and gradual but steady reform.

While the PT's radical minority feels its first pangs of disillusionment, so far Brazil's people appear to be with Lula for the long haul. Polls show him still enjoying record levels of public support, with an approval rating hovering around 70 percent. Positive market indicators have bolstered his recent promises to convert 2003, "the year of tolerance," into a "spectacle of growth" in 2004. And while constrained by foreign capital at home, Lula's audacious initiatives abroad—especially his tough stands at last year's Cancun and Miami trade talks—reveal his still-fiery commitment to making free trade fair and lifting social concerns to the top of the globalization agenda.

Time will tell whether Lula becomes master of the Clintonian fudge or the stalwart leader the developing world deserves. What his critics overlook is the way the PT's transparent, accountable style of governance itself challenges Washington-led globalization. Where *Lula* ends—an account by Hilary Wainwright of stirring successes in Porto Alegre's participatory self-government—globalization's many actors might begin a long overdue search for alternative political models.

Liberal capitalism's longevity "is rooted in a proclaimed respect for democracy," Wainwright writes. "The problem is that democracy rarely puts capitalism to the test." It's high time the locals start teaching the internationals a thing or two about poverty, democracy and macroeconomic policies that make sense. ■

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Organized labor in the United States has consistently produced more political graphics than any other domestic movement for social change—and done so with unprecedented continuity. With its evolving populations and social conditions, the labor movement has been producing powerful images for more than 150 years.

Solidarity Forever! provides a small sampling of an extraordinary graphic tradition. Some causes are well known; others might have been forgotten were it not for the survival of a graphic. These posters remind viewers of a too often hidden history, rally against exploitation and warn that dangerous conditions in the workplace still occur.

Posters give witness to a history of labor struggles, prevent issues from being lost to future generations and show the vital role of art in motivating social change. The use of the poster as a primary tool in organizing support for workers' rights remains strong. And although many of the posters are historical, the issues are not. The eight-hour day is no longer sacrosanct, and the workplace often is a battleground. These posters persuade threatened workers and consumers and supervisors are appealing through history in the United States.

Through this and other traveling exhibitions, the Center for the Study of Political Graphics (CSPG) is reclaiming the power of art to inform, inspire and incite to action. ■

Carol A. Wells is executive director of the CSPG (www.politicalgraphics.org).

SOLIDARITY FOREVER!

runs through February 27, 2004, at the offices of *In These Times*, 2000 Milwaukee Avenue, Chicago. The exhibit is open noon-5 p.m. Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. The exhibit will have extended hours February 6-8, 5-7 Friday, 10-6 Saturday and 12-5 Sunday. The show is cosponsored by Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Illinois State Council, SEIU Local 880 and AFSCME Council 31.

Graphics of the In SOLIDAR



Agitate Educate Organize

Artist unknown
Laser copy, 1998
Venice, California

Not only does this graphic inject a playful note of romance into labor, it borrows from the high-art world of artist Roy Lichtenstein, who in turn borrowed from comics to make his message and commentary at the height of the Pop Art era.

SUPPORT STRIKING MINERS IN STEARNS, KENTUCKY



Support the Striking Miners in Stearns, Kentucky

San Francisco Poster Brigade
Offset, ca. 1978
San Francisco, California

But I Want

California State Employees
Association; Service Employees
International Union, Local 10
Offset, n
Californ