



Brazilian workers carry sacks of gold bearing rock at the Serra Pelada open cast mines. Over 50 000 workers work under appalling conditions at these mines in the Eastern Amazon.

BRAZIL

A WORKERS' PARTY

One of the main reasons for the fact that only four percent of Brazil's population voted for the Workers' Party was that the party was a new organisation and many people were not sure whether it would succeed. So they were cautious about giving it support. It had not yet proved itself. Many of its ideas were new and workers needed a chance to get used to them. Even though thousands saw the need to support the party, many millions had not had the experience of the big strike movements to guide them.

Another reason for its low support was the rules of the election. These rules were decided by the army. They said that all your votes had to go to candidates of the same party. So if you wanted to vote for the Workers' Party for your local council but not for governor, you could not do that. Your vote would be cancelled.

Some workers felt that the main thing in the elections was to defeat the ruling party which had supported the military in power. So they decided to vote for the main opposition party, the PMDB, which stood for the best chance of defeating the government's party. But if they voted for the PMDB for practical reasons, they had to stick to this for all the different seats which were being elected. They could not give support to the Workers' Party, even at local level, without breaking the rules and wasting their vote.

All this did not mean that the Workers' Party lost support. In fact, party membership has risen to almost a quarter of a million supporters. But it did mean that the Workers' Party had less of a voice in the national and state assemblies and in local councils.

Trade union struggle not parliamentary politics

There were two other groups who felt it was not a good idea to support the Workers' Party. The one group felt that it

Continuing his two-part feature which looks at the Workers' Party in Brazil, David Fig of the International Labour Research and Information Group explains why only four percent of the people voted for the party in the elections. He suggests that the main reason was that the party had not yet proved itself, however, there were also divisions among the workers and other groupings as to whether to give support to the Workers' Party.

was not important to get involved in parliamentary politics. The main task of the workers was to carry on building the trade union struggle. There were still many problems inside the trade unions which had to be overcome, like getting rid of the leaders who supported the government and bosses, like fighting for shop stewards' committees inside all the factories, and so on.

Another group thought that it was important to get involved in party politics, but they preferred to support the bigger opposition party, the PMDB. This party consisted of a number of liberal and some conservative politicians, and had the support of businessmen, students, some intellectuals, and middle class interests. In some parts of Brazil, there was a good chance for the PMDB to do well in elections, because so many of the people were against the military dictatorship. The PMDB had always opposed army rule and believed in democracy.

Brazil has two communist parties, both of which are illegal. They could not run their own candidates in elections. So, instead they gave their support to the PMDB. They felt that the Workers' Party represented only the 'narrow interests of workers', while the PMDB represented a large variety of interests which together would make up a stronger force against the military government.

The Workers' Party argued that the PMDB was not a party which spoke up for workers. It was a party which represented the views of the bosses. So it was difficult to see that workers would benefit by giving it support. The whole history of Brazilian politics showed that the workers had never benefited much from supporting parties which had no worker leadership.

Inside the unions, the Workers' Party supporters also argued that it was

wrong for the supporters of the two communist parties to give their backing to the stooges and yes-men of the government who were put in charge of some of the unions. The two groups refused to give their support to the Workers' Party.

In many cases the trade union movement and the workers' political movement have not reached full unity.

But there was one issue which brought out the greatest amount of unity ever seen in Brazil.

The military decided that the next president should be elected from the politicians rather than from the military itself. Power would pass from the army back to the civilian president and the parliament. This was a great victory for the Workers' Party and the rest of the democratic movement which had been struggling to end 21 years of military rule.

But instead of agreeing that all the voters in Brazil could choose the next president, the army said that only 686 people could vote. These 686 consisted of MPs, state representatives and city councillors.

When the people heard that they themselves would not be able to vote they were very angry indeed. The Workers' Party, together with other democratic organisations, launched a campaign for what they called DIRECT elections, where everyone would have the vote for the next president of Brazil.

One million protest in the streets of Rio

This campaign was huge. In the streets of Rio de Janeiro, one million people protested their right to vote. In Sao Paulo, even more came out into the

streets to demonstrate — a million and a half.

But the military still refused to allow everyone the vote. So the Workers' Party decided to boycott the election completely. This meant that the party MPs and councillors would not be part of the 686 who could vote.

The two parties that were left in the race were the government party, which had supported the army in power for 21 years, and the PMDB opposition. Each of these put up a candidate. But the government party's candidate was a corrupt politician who was hated by many in his party. So this caused a split, and many MPs left the government party and decided to vote for the PMDB candidate, for president.

In the elections, the PMDB-breakaway coalition won the majority of the 686 votes. So the PMDB candidate, Tancredo Neves, and the breakaway vice-president Jose Sarney were ready to take office on January 15 1985.

But on January 14, Tancredo Neves fell ill, and after seven serious operations, died in hospital in April. So even though the army is no longer directly in power, even though Brazil is supposed to become a democracy again, the man who is president today was one of the people who for many years supported the dictatorship in power. And most of the people in his cabinet are bankers, businessmen and politicians from the old regime. There are no workers in the cabinet. And the government has not introduced policies in favour of the working class.

Struggle continues for a fully democratic Brazil

But most people under-

stand that the president was not elected by all the people of Brazil. The Workers' Party is carrying on its struggle for direct elections and for a fully democratic Brazil.

As Lula put it, 'The government has no policy of full employment, no policy on education and so on. We see the task of the Workers' Party is to expose this and to get back to basic issues, the demands from the slums. Our focus is our stomachs, our houses, our schools. Democracy means the right to life — the basic rights, housing, transport, land and work. Democracy is not a word game, it's a practice. It's people being able to decide what they want to do. My personal belief is the dictatorship of the proletariat and for me that means that the majority decides things. Until the workers take over the political and economic decisions, we won't have democracy in Brazil.'

Lula is still president of the party and has also been elected to the executive of the metalworkers' union which he once led. So he still has direct contact with the shop floor and the everyday struggles of the workers.

The Workers' Party has also given its support to a new trade union federation of the more militant unions. This federation, the CUT (Central Unica Dos Trabalhadores), was formed in 1983 and does not enjoy legal status under Brazil's harsh labour laws. But nevertheless it has support in many parts of Brazil and is struggling for an independent labour movement free from government interference and control. It has been the main force behind the huge strikes of May 1985, in which many thousands of workers, civil servants and teachers united against the government's attempts to freeze wages and stop all strikes.

The Workers' Party still faces many problems in trying to organise and to spread support all over Brazil. Its main strength is still in the Sao Paulo area and in some rural parts of Brazil. It needs to work very hard to get its ideas across to all Brazilian workers. But as an experiment in giving political content to the struggles of Brazil's workers, the future of the Workers' Party is one worth watching.