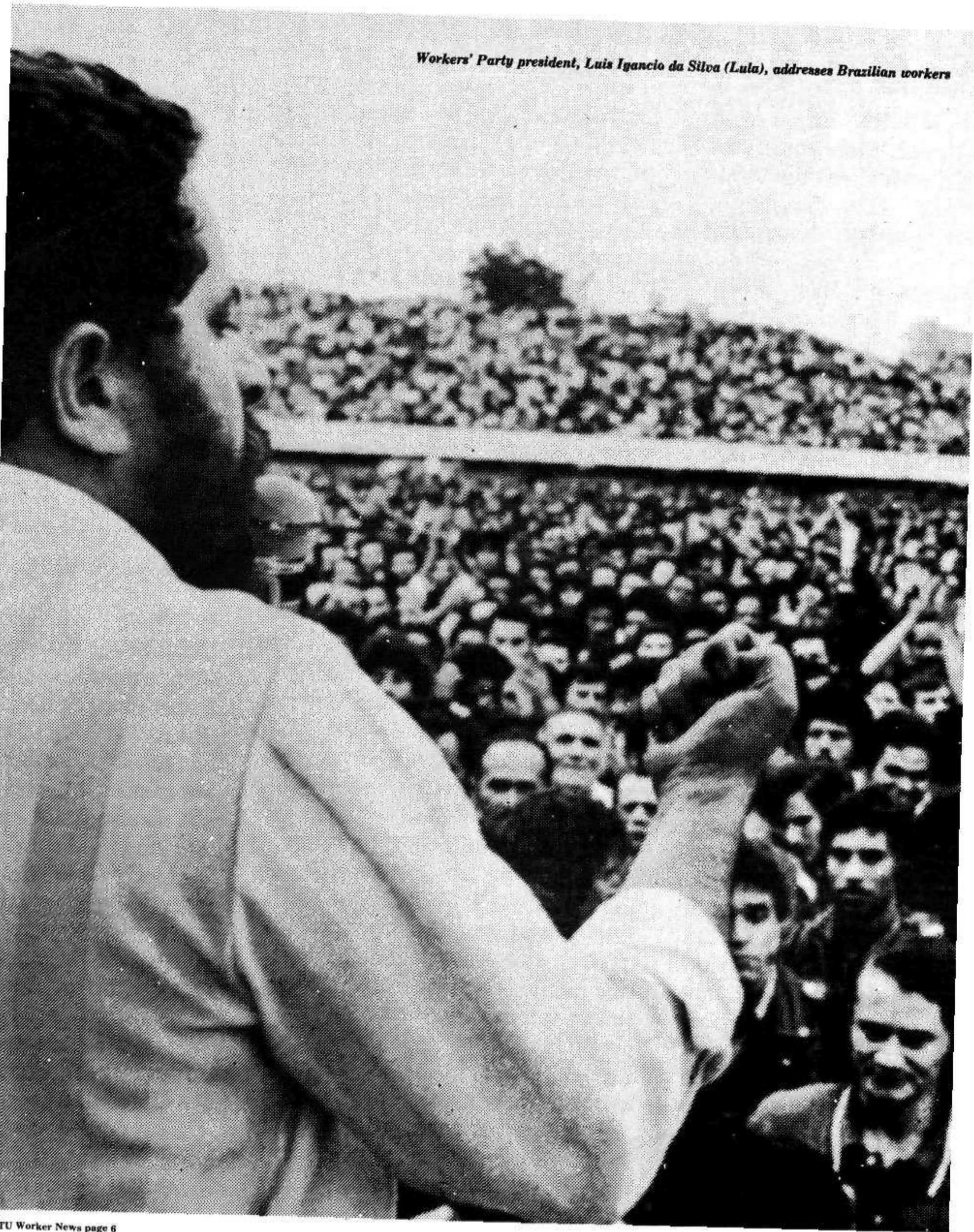


# BRAZIL A PARTY

*Workers' Party president, Luis Inacio da Silva (Lula), addresses Brazilian workers*





# FOR WORKERS

**T**he man with the beard stood in front of the crowd and began to speak.

'Friends and fellow workers,' he said, 'It's not enough for us to struggle so hard against the employers. Our fight is also against the military who are ruling our country. We cannot change the situation of workers in Brazil without challenging the government, and bringing in a government of workers who will understand our needs. For many years, the military prevented us from organising, but now they are speaking of 'reform'. We must take advantage of this to organise. None of the legal political parties talk about the needs of the workers and the poor. What we need, friends, is a political party to put forward our political demands. We need to form a Workers' Party to take our struggles forward!'

The crowd of workers cheered loudly, and began to chant the name of the speaker over and over: 'Lu-la! Lu-la! Lu-la!'

This scene was repeated in many parts of Brazil, the biggest country in Latin America, where all through the big strikes of 1978 and 1979, Lula had led the car and metal workers union of a big industrial area just outside the city of Sao Paulo.

Lula and his fellow leaders showed workers that for the first time in many years the unions could become instruments of the workers' struggles. Before this, the military had tried to make the unions powerless and many genuine leaders had been locked up in prison or exiled to foreign countries. In many cases the military put its own yes-men in to run the unions.

But Lula and his friends were different. They could see that the workers were sick of accepting bad wages and poor working conditions. They were prepared to stand up and fight for a better deal.

But they also realised that with the backing of their membership and the support received from the community, they could not reach their goals by sticking only to the economic struggles on the factory floor. They also needed to struggle for political rights and political power. That led them to the idea of organising a political party. They decided to call it the Workers' Party (Partido dos Trabalhadores).

Until 1979 those who could not read or write did not have the vote. But after 1979 everyone was allowed to vote. So Lula and his friends thought that it was a good time to create a party for workers. The workers would

lead the party, but they also encouraged others to support them. They remembered that during the strikes, workers received support from people who were not in factory jobs, like teachers, health workers, students, the unemployed and the popular sections of the church. So they invited support from these groups, bearing in mind that most of the party's leaders would be industrial workers.

The idea caught on and all over Brazil there was an enthusiastic reaction. Lula's speeches persuaded many people that it was a good idea. It was a new type of politics as well.

In Brazil for many years the politicians told people how to think and how to vote and the people were given very little say in how politics was run. But the Workers' Party decided it would operate on democratic lines. All the members would have a say in the running of the party. Branches of the party were started all over the country, in the factories and in the community. The leaders must be elected by delegates from the branches. The leaders should respect what was decided by the majority of the members. Everything should be decided by conferences.

The other parties had some respect for democracy, but their branches were only active at the time of elections when they wanted votes from the people. The Workers' Party tried to stay organised from the beginning. It encouraged the branches to be active all the time, not just during the elections.

In any case, the elections could not be trusted to represent the workers of Brazil. When the rules for elections were decided, the workers had never been asked what they thought. In fact from 1964 onwards, it was the army generals who made the rules for the elections. They were not on the side of the workers, and did not want to see the workers in power.

The Workers' Party realised that they could not win power through this system of army-controlled elections. But they still thought it was important to use the elections to get support for their ideas. Their candidates could make speeches all over the country about the need for workers to organise politically and in unions.

This would also be a chance for workers to hear that the party was in favour of a socialist system for Brazil. Brazil is a capitalist country, in which the factory owners and big farmers keep most of the wealth. The richest two percent of the population owns

**In March this year, Brazil, the largest country in South America, ended 20 years of rule by a military government. When the army came in to power in 1964, they crushed worker organisations by jailing and murdering trade union leaders. But from 1978 the workers began to fight back and strikes broke out all over Brazil. By 1980 over a million workers had been on strike. The workers were fighting for better pay and working conditions. They also wanted an end to military rule. After the end of the 1980 strikes, the government announced that there would be elections to choose a new government. A number of trade union leaders felt the time was right to form a political party to represent workers' interests. The new party was called Partido dos Trabalhadores (Workers' Party). David Fig of the International Labour Research and Information Group (ILRIG) recently visited Brazil. In this two-part article he looks at the new Workers' Party and discusses its election campaign. It is important for workers in South Africa to see how other workers are fighting their struggles so that we can learn from other countries. But, it is important not to just copy them. The history and political situation in South Africa is often very different to these countries. So, we need to develop our own solutions using the lessons we have learnt from our own experience together with the lessons learnt from the experience of workers in other countries.**

50 percent (half) of the country's wealth, while most of Brazil's 40 million workers earn under R55 per week including overtime.

Such low wages for the majority means that there is a lot of poverty, hunger and misery amongst the working class. It is hard for most workers and the unemployed to afford decent houses, and many are forced to live in shanties with no light, water or toilets. As a result there are big health problems.

Under capitalism prices are rising all the time. In South Africa, we are told that inflation is already over 15 percent and rising. But in Brazil inflation is more than 200 percent! For food it is even higher, about 400 percent. This means that if you paid R1 for a loaf of bread last year, this year it would cost R4. And the wages are not going up quickly enough, so people can afford less and less. They often have to go hungry.

By arguing for socialism, the Workers' Party showed that it was interested to see a fairer system in Brazil, where workers shared more in the wealth of the country, where inflation did not rob them of their food and wages, and where they had a direct say in the running of the country.

So the election campaigns were a good chance to ex-

plain that there was an alternative to the capitalist system.

It was also a chance for some candidates from the Workers' Party to get into parliament and local government, to make their voices heard more widely and more often.

The first chance of elections came in November 1982. Voters had to choose MP's for parliament, some senators, municipal councils, mayors and state governors (Brazil is divided into 23 states). Until then, the army had chosen all the state governors; this was the first time in 18 years that the people were given the chance to choose governors for themselves.

In the 1982 elections, Lula was put forward as the Workers' Party candidate for governor of the state of Sao Paulo, the state with the biggest number of workers in Brazil.

But the army government tried to stop him. In the strikes of 1980, Lula and 15 other trade union leaders were arrested by the security police. The army then put its own agents in to run the union, but they were very unpopular, and could not put a stop to the strikes. Lula and the others were charged with being a threat to the national security. But they never served their sentences of three and a half

years and were eventually released from detention. So the army could not interfere with Lula's political plans.

During the elections he and other party candidates went round the country building support for the Workers' Party. They spoke to huge crowds in the big cities and in the rural areas.

But, in the end, when the results of the elections were announced, the Workers' Party had not won so many votes as they expected. Lula and many others had failed to win their seats. There were a few successful Workers' Party MP's elected to the parliament and to the state assemblies. There were also a number of city councillors and even a mayor or two elected from the Workers' Party. For example, in the big city of Rio de Janeiro, a black woman from a shanty town area was voted on to the city council to represent the Workers' Party. But all in all it was a disappointing performance.

In Brazil overall, only four out of every hundred voters (4 percent) voted for the Workers' Party candidates. In the industrial areas of Sao Paulo, about 10 percent of the votes went to the party. NEXT ISSUE: We look at the major reasons why so few people voted for the Workers' Party in the elections.