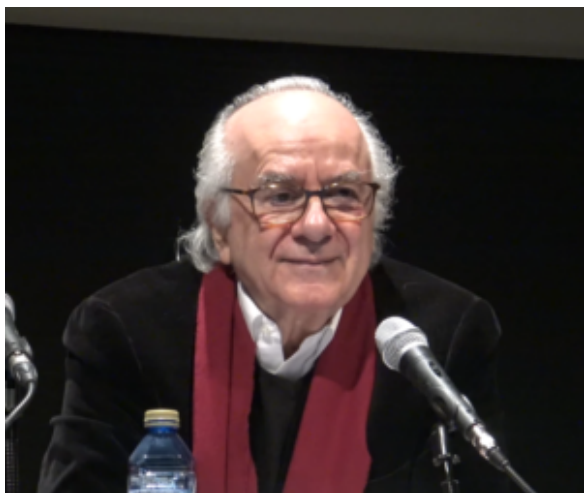


10 Suggestions For Lula, New President Of Brazil



*Boaventura de Sousa Santos - Photo:
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Dear President Lula,

When I visited you (Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva) in prison on August 30, 2018, in the brief time that the visit lasted, I experienced a whirlwind of ideas and emotions that remain as vivid today as they were then. A short time before, we had been together at the World Social Forum in Salvador da Bahia. In the penthouse of the hotel where you were staying, we exchanged ideas with Brazilian politician Jacques Wagner about your imprisonment. You still had some hope that the judicial system would suspend the persecutory vertigo that had descended upon you. I, perhaps because I am a legal sociologist, was convinced that this would not happen, but I did not insist. At one point, I had the feeling that you and I were actually thinking and fearing the same thing. A short time later, they were arresting you with the same arrogant and compulsive indifference with which they had been treating you up to that point. Judge Sergio Moro, who had [links](#) with the U.S. (it is too late to be naive), had accomplished the first part of his mission by putting you behind bars. The second part would be to keep you locked up and isolated until “his” candidate (Jair Bolsonaro) was elected, one who would give Moro a platform to get to the presidency of the republic later on. This is the third phase of the mission, still underway.

When I entered the premises of Brazil's federal police, I felt a chill when I read the plaque marking that President Lula da Silva had inaugurated those facilities 11 years earlier as part of his vast program to upgrade the federal police and criminal investigation system in the country. A whirlwind of questions assaulted me. Had the plaque remained there out of oblivion? Out of cruelty? Or to show that the spell had turned against the sorcerer? That a bona fide president had handed the gold to the bandit?

I was accompanied by a pleasant young federal police officer who turned to me and said, "We read your books a lot." I was shocked. If my books were read and the message understood, neither Lula nor I would be there. I babbled something to this effect, and the answer was instantaneous: "We are following orders." Suddenly, the Nazi legal theorist Carl Schmitt came to my mind. To be a sovereign is to have the prerogative to declare that something is legal even if is not, and to impose your will bureaucratically with the normality of functional obedience and the consequent trivialization of state terror.

This is how I arrived at your cell, and surely you did not even suspect the storm that was going on inside me. Upon seeing you, I calmed down. I was faced with dignity and humanity that gave me hope for mankind. Everything was normal within the totalitarian abnormality that had enclosed you there: The windows, the gym apparatus, the books, and the television. Our conversation was as normal as everything around us, including your lawyers and Gleisi Hoffmann, who was then the general secretary of the Workers' Party. We talked about the situation in Latin America, the new (old) aggressiveness of the empire, and the judicial system that had converted into an ersatz military coup.

When the door closed behind me, the weight of the illegal will of a state held hostage by criminals armed with legal manipulations fell back on me once again. I braced myself between revolt and anger and the well-behaved performance expected of a public intellectual who on his way out has to make statements to the press. I did everything, but what I truly felt was that I had left behind Brazil's freedom and dignity imprisoned so that the empire and the elites in its service could fulfill their objectives of guaranteeing access to Brazil's immense natural resources, privatization of social security, and unconditional alignment with the geopolitics of rivalry with China.

The serenity and dignity with which you faced a year of confinement is proof that

empires, especially decadent ones, often miscalculate, precisely because they only think in the short term. The immense and growing national and international solidarity, which would make you the most famous political prisoner in the world, showed that the Brazilian people were beginning to believe that at least part of what was destroyed in the short term might be rebuilt in the medium and long term. Your imprisonment was the price of the credibility of this conviction; your subsequent freedom was proof that the conviction has become reality.

I am writing to you today first to congratulate you on your victory in the October 30 election. It is an extraordinary achievement without precedent in the history of democracy. I often say that sociologists are good at predicting the past, not the future, but this time I was not wrong. That does not make me feel any more certain about what I must tell you today. Take these considerations as an expression of my best wishes for you personally and for the office you are about to take on as the president of Brazil.

1. It would be a serious mistake to think that with your victory in Brazil's presidential election everything is back to normal in the country. First, the normal situation prior to former President Jair Bolsonaro was very precarious for the most vulnerable populations, even if it was less so than it is now. Second, Bolsonaro inflicted such damage on Brazilian society that is difficult to repair. He has produced a civilizational regression by rekindling the embers of violence typical of a society that was subjected to European colonialism: the idolatry of individual property and the consequent social exclusion, racism, and sexism; the privatization of the state so that the rule of law coexists with the rule of illegality; and an excluding of religion this time in the form of neo-Pentecostal evangelism. The colonial divide is reactivated in the pattern of friend/enemy, us/them polarization, typical of the extreme right. With this, Bolsonaro has created a radical rupture that makes educational and democratic mediation difficult. Recovery will take years.

2. If the previous note points to the medium term, the truth is that your presidency will be dominated by the short term. Bolsonaro has brought back hunger, broken the state financially, deindustrialized the country, let hundreds of thousands of COVID victims die needlessly, and promised to put an end to the Amazon. The emergency camp is the one in which you move best and in which I am sure you will be most successful. Just two caveats. You will no doubt return to the policies you have successfully spearheaded, but mind you, the conditions are

now vastly different and more adverse. On the other hand, everything has to be done without expecting political gratitude from the social classes benefiting from the emergency measures. The impersonal way of benefiting, which is proper to the state, makes people see their personal merit or right in the benefits, and not the merit or benevolence of those who make them possible. There is only one way of showing that such measures result neither from personal merit nor from the benevolence of donors but are rather the product of political alternatives: ensuring education for citizenship.

3. One of the most harmful aspects of the backlash brought about by Bolsonaro is the anti-rights ideology ingrained in the social fabric, targeting previously marginalized social groups (poor, Black, Indigenous, Roma, and LGBTQI+ people). Holding on firmly to a policy of social, economic, and cultural rights as a guarantee of ample dignity in a very unequal society should be the basic principle of democratic governments today.

4. The international context is dominated by three mega-threats: recurring pandemics, ecological collapse, and a possible third world war. Each of these threats is global in scope, but political solutions remain predominantly limited to the national scale. Brazilian diplomacy has traditionally been exemplary in the search for agreements, whether regional (Latin American cooperation) or global (BRICS). We live in a time of interregnum between a unipolar world dominated by the United States that has not yet fully disappeared and a multipolar world that has not yet been fully born. The interregnum is seen, for example, in the deceleration of globalization and the return of protectionism, the partial replacement of free trade with trade by friendly partners. All states remain formally independent, but only a few are sovereign. And among the latter, not even the countries of the European Union are to be counted. You left the government when China was the great partner of the United States and return when China is the great rival of the United States. You have always been a supporter of the multipolar world and China cannot but be today a partner of Brazil. Given the growing cold war between the United States and China, I predict that the honeymoon period between U.S. President Joe Biden and yourself will not last long.

5. You today have a world credibility that enables you to be an effective mediator in a world mined by increasingly tense conflicts. You can be a mediator in the Russia/Ukraine conflict, two countries whose people urgently need peace, at a

time when the countries of the European Union have embraced the U.S. version of the conflict without a Plan B; they have therefore condemned themselves to the same fate as the U.S.-dominated unipolar world. You will also be a credible mediator in the case of Venezuela's isolation and in bringing the shameful embargo against Cuba to an end. To accomplish all this, you must have the internal front pacified, and here lies the greatest difficulty.

6. You will have to live with the permanent threat of destabilization. This is the mark of the extreme right. It is a global movement that corresponds to the inability of neoliberal capitalism to coexist in the next period in a minimal democratic way. Although global, it takes on specific characteristics in each country. The general aim is to convert cultural or ethnic diversity into political or religious polarization. In Brazil, as in India, there is the risk of attributing to such polarization the character of a religious war, be it between Catholics and Evangelicals, or between fundamentalist Christians and religions of African origin (Brazil), or between Hindus and Muslims (India). In religious wars, conciliation is almost impossible. The extreme right creates a parallel reality immune to any confrontation with the actual reality. On that basis, it can justify the cruelest violence. Its main objective is to prevent you, President Lula, from peacefully finishing your term.

7. You currently have the support of the United States in your favor. It is well known that all U.S. foreign policy is determined by domestic political reasons. President Biden knows that, by defending you, he is defending himself against former President Trump, his possible rival in 2024. It so happens that the United States today is the most fractured society in the world, where the democratic game coexists with a plutocratic far right strong enough to make about 25 percent of the U.S. population still believe that Joe Biden's victory in the 2020 presidential election was the result of an electoral fraud. This far right is willing to do anything. Their aggressiveness is demonstrated by the attempt by one of their followers to kidnap and torture Nancy Pelosi, leader of the Democrats in the House of Representatives. Furthermore, right after the attack, a battery of fake news was put into circulation to justify the act—something that can very well happen in Brazil as well. So, today the United States is a dual country: the official country that promises to defend Brazilian democracy, and the unofficial country that promises to subvert it in order to rehearse what it wants to achieve in the United States. Let us remember that the extreme right started as the official

policy of the country. Hyper-conservative evangelicalism started as an American project (see the Rockefeller report of 1969) to combat “the insurrectionary potential” of liberation theology. And let it be said, in fairness, that for a long time its main ally was former Pope John Paul II.

8. Since 2014, Brazil has been living through a continued coup process, the elites’ response to the progress that the popular classes achieved with your governments. That coup process did not end with your victory. It only changed rhythm and tactics. Throughout these years and especially in the last electoral period we have witnessed multiple illegalities and even political crimes committed with an almost naturalized impunity. Besides the many committed by the head of the government, we have seen, for example, senior members of the armed forces and security forces calling for a coup d’état and publicly siding with a presidential candidate while in office. Such behavior should be punished by the judiciary or by compulsory retirement. Any idea of amnesty, no matter how noble its motives may be, will be a trap in the path of your presidency. The consequences could be fatal.

9. It is well known that you do not place a high priority on characterizing your politics as being left or right. Curiously, shortly before being elected president of Colombia, Gustavo Petro stated that the important distinction for him was not between left and right, but between politics of life and politics of death. The politics of life today in Brazil is sincere ecological politics, the continuation and deepening of policies of racial and sexual justice, labor rights, investment in public health care and education, respect for the demarcated lands of Indigenous peoples, and the enactment of pending demarcations. A gradual but firm transition is needed from agrarian monoculture and natural resource extractivism to a diversified economy that allows respect for different socioeconomic logics and virtuous articulations between the capitalist economy and the peasant, family, cooperative, social-solidarity, Indigenous, riverine, and *quilombola* economies that have so much vitality in Brazil.

10. The state of grace is short. It does not even last 100 days (see President Gabriel Boric in Chile). You have to do everything not to lose the people that elected you. Symbolic politics is fundamental in the early days. One suggestion: immediately reinstate the national conferences (built on bottom-up participatory democracy) to give an unequivocal sign that there is another, more democratic, and more participative way of doing politics.

Author Bio: This article was produced by [Globetrotter](#).

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