

The CUT's Experience During the Workers' Party's (PT) Governments in Brazil (2003-2016)

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Abstract

This paper looks at the development of the Unified Workers' Central of Brazil (CUT) during the four consecutive PT governments, first under Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and later under Dilma Rousseff (2003-2016). The authors maintain that this period – coinciding with the first one and a half decades of the millennium – has been characterized by contradictory elements. On the one hand, factors such as the social and economic policies implemented, the close relationship between the CUT and the PT and the progress achieved in collective bargaining and unionization strengthened the CUT's structural, associational and institutional powers. On the other hand, the CUT had to find ways of handling its dual role of representing the workers' interests and partaking in government at grassroots level, while facing criticism from more conservative segments of society. The CUT's societal power began to decline from 2013 onwards despite the ongoing effort to establish alliances, and was further weakened by the economic and political crisis in 2015, which ultimately culminated in the illegitimate impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff. With Michel Temer taking over government, retrogressive reforms in areas such as social security and workers' rights have reappeared on the agenda. They will put the CUT to the test. Its ability to mobilize, to build alliances, and to strengthen its framing capacity will be decisive for maintaining its associational and societal power.

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José Dari Krein and Hugo Dias

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