

Chapter Summaries

Brazil's Lula: The Most Popular Politician on Earth

By Ted Goertzel

Chapter One: An Abusive Father and a Courageous Mother.

Lula's mother's courage and determination gives her children a chance at a decent life after being abandoned in abject poverty in the rural northeast by their father. Lula absorbs his mother's values and develops what he calls a "maternal" model of governing.

Chapter Two: Coming of Age in São Paulo

Lula and his mother migrate to São Paulo on the back of a truck to reunite with his father, only to find that he had not really sent for them. His illiterate father opposes sending the children to school. His mother rebels, sends the children to school, and finally leaves his father. Lula wins entry to a vocational school where he becomes a lathe mechanic, the first in his family to have a skilled profession.

Chapter Three: The Struggle for Workers' Dignity

Lula's activist older brother, Frei Chico, introduces him to the labor movement at a time of militancy. Lula assumes leadership of the social services department of the metalworkers union, and uses this position as a path into union leadership. A natural leader, he gets along well with all the factions in the union. The leading newspapers highlight him as a nonpolitical labor leader with a true working class background. He defies the military government and the careerist labor leaders by leading massive strikes, and is arrested by the political police.

Chapter Four: The Long Struggle for the Presidency

As democracy returns to Brazil, Lula joins with other labor leaders, social activists and intellectuals to form a new Workers' Party with an innovative structure of internal democracy. His charismatic personality wins him a large popular following, and the Workers' Party nominates him three times for president. Each time, he inspires the left but frightens the middle-of-the-road voters he needs to win. Finally, in his fourth campaign he hires a professional campaign consultant, and adopts a "Lula Lite" image. The public loves it and he wins by a landslide.

Chapter Five: Keeping the Economic Ship Afloat

Lula campaigned on a nebulous platform of "change," but once in office he decided to retain the fundamental macroeconomic policies of his predecessor, Fernando Henrique Cardoso. Many of his leftist comrades are outraged, but the policies turn out to be much more successful than they anticipated. Lula's popularity grows. He denies that he is building on the past and insists that his policies are new, but what is really new is his style of communication.

Chapter Six: Vote-Buying and Corruption Scandals

Lula's administrations are plagued by corruption and vote-buying scandals exposed by Brazil's vigorous free press. He argues that there really isn't more corruption, it just looks that way because his government is cleaning house. But there's an awful lot of dirt, especially in some of the parties allied with the Workers' Party. Some intellectuals and idealists are disillusioned, but most of Lula's fans shrug it off as just Brazilian politics as usual. His chief of staff accepts the blame and resigns, leaving Lula unscathed.

Chapter Seven: Ending Hunger with Family Allowances

Lula announces an inspiring "Zero Hunger" program in his inaugural address, but it gets bogged down in bureaucratic confusion and inefficiency. So he switches the focus to a Family Allowance program that distributes cash to needy families and lets them buy whatever they need. The Family Allowances build on an existing School Allowances program with an established infrastructure, but Lula puts a lot more money into it. The result is less poverty and hunger and a tremendous boost in Lula's popularity with the poor.

Chapter Eight: Rural Development, Land Reform and the Environment

Lula and the Workers' Party had long supported the Landless Farmers' Movement which demanded breaking up commercial farms and distributing the land to poor farmers who would produce food for local consumption. Once in office, however, Lula was very supportive of Brazil's lucrative commercial export agriculture and reluctant to expand the land reform efforts. The Lula government stressed making land reform settlements more successful, even at considerable expense, rather than just expanding the program.

Chapter Nine: From Participatory Budgeting to Advisory Councils

The Workers' Party had pioneered a participatory budgeting system intended to bypass representative institutions and politics as usual. But making decisions in large meetings open to everyone worked better in small communities than on the national level. Instead, Lula created advisory councils with representatives from established community, labor, advocacy and business groups. These councils generally work on a consensus model, formulating policies that can win broad support.

Chapter Ten: Building National Self-Esteem with Foreign Policy

Lula emphasizes personal diplomacy and travels extensively around the world. His stated purpose is to build Brazilians' national self-esteem by asserting a stronger role in international bodies and strengthening economic and political ties to developing nations in Africa and Asia. His friendships with a number of third world dictators, including Fidel Castro and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, bring criticism from human rights groups.

Chapter Eleven: Winning Reelection in 2006

In 2006, Lula ran on his record. Most Brazilians were satisfied with the progress the country was making and found him more personable than his major opponent, anesthesiologist Geraldo Alckmin of São Paulo. Some leftists split from the Workers' Party to form a more radical coalition, but it attracted few votes. Corruption scandals break out during the campaign, causing Lula to fail to win a majority in the first round of the elections. But he wins the runoff by a substantial margin, putting him in a strong position for his second term.

Chapter Twelve: Making Brazilian Capitalism Boom

After a lackluster first few years, the economy took off in Lula's second term. Economists attributed the success to his policy of continuity with the previous government, but Lula insisted it was due to changes he had made. Brazil benefited from increasing world prices for its raw material exports, due especially to growing demand from China. The economic crisis of 2008 had surprisingly modest impact on Brazil due to its more conservative fiscal and regulatory policies and its diversified trade relationships. Lula's popularity skyrocketed.

Chapter Thirteen: Socialism, Economic Solidarity and Micro-Capitalism

The Workers' Party advocates "socialism" in its platform, but its concept of socialism includes multi-party democracy and a mix of private and public enterprises. Worker-owned and cooperative enterprises are supported through an "economic solidarity" program. Micro-financing is supplied to poor people to start very small businesses. The primary force in the economy, however, continues to be corporate capitalism including large-scale commercial farming. Lula doesn't care about abstract concepts, he supports whatever works.

Chapter Fourteen: Electing a Successor

Lula squelches all efforts to amend the constitution to permit him to run for a third term. To avoid a primary fight in the Workers' Party, Lula announces that he will support his chief of staff, Dilma Rousseff, for the nomination. Dilma was not well known to the public and had never run for public office. But this meant she had no baggage of her own and could run purely as Lula's stand-in. Her campaign performance was good enough to reassure voters who wanted to continue the successes of the Lula years.

Chapter Fifteen: The Son of Brazil in Power

Lula is the first president to emerge from the Brazilian masses, the first one without a university or military academy education. His world view is fundamentally Christian and feminist, not Marxist. Although he came from the labor movement and the Workers' Party, his approach to governing was to build consensus rather than conflict and radical change. Maintaining consensus meant not radically changing the macroeconomic policies of his predecessor, but he had no real disagreement with those policies and they worked out well. Brazilians, especially from the working and impoverished classes, liked his style and were happy to give him credit for the country's success.