

***“IN ORDER TO BE SUSTAINABLE WE HAVE TO BREAK THE CURRENT
CORRUPT LOGIC OF POWER”***



Marcelo Freixo, Rio de Janeiro's Governor candidate for the Brazilian Socialist Party



Article by Leonardo Martins Dias

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The member of the Brazilian Socialist Party, Marcelo Freixo, leads the vote intention polls for the government of Rio de Janeiro in October by a technical tie. He does it with Claudio Castro, from the Christian Social Party, who is the current governor in substitution of the previous one, sentenced to prison for corruption. Freixo is a teacher as well as a well-known veteran human rights activist. Today he is running in alliance with former president Lula da Silva, who is running again as a candidate. Freixo is one of the main actors against corruption in Brazil: he was the first to launch and preside over an investigation against the militia mafia -which usually arises from state apparatuses, such as the police-, which dominates 58.6% of the territory of Rio de Janeiro. These groups compete for power with other criminal organizations, while the president of Brazil, Jair Bolsonaro, institutionalizes them by decorating them and hiring them for his cabinets. Although Freixo's work has inspired a celebrated film ('Tropa de Elite 2'), it has also cost him more than his own peace of mind: in 2006, his brother was murdered after firing militia guards from the condominium where he was a manager;

in 2011, the deputy went into exile in Spain two weeks after receiving seven death threats in one month. Currently, in fact, he lives escorted with his family in Rio de Janeiro. We talked to him about the future of Rio (and Brazil).

Leonardo: Sustainability is a driver of the future, but what are the guidelines of his sustainability plan for the province of Rio de Janeiro?

Freixo: Education is our master guideline, as it conditions everything else, including sustainability. On my first day of work teaching classes in prisons, no inmate showed up. They preferred to play soccer. We solved it by talking with them and creating the school together. That experience taught us that listening to students was key, and that Paulo Freire's teaching methodologies had very good social results. Following these methodological lines, if I am elected [as governor] we will have to recover 22 months of the pandemic, a time in which students in the public system received an average of 2 hours and 20 minutes of daily class. From occupying 4th place in 2013, Rio has fallen today to 22nd [among the 27 Brazilian provinces]. We will create school residences to reinforce education using listening processes, and we will do it because we consider residences and schools as spaces to involve families and young people before drug traffickers or militias recruit them on the streets. We think of these spaces as places for adult literacy, meeting and dialogue to solve problems in communities. They are listening places because everyone, including the children of drug traffickers and paramilitaries, goes [through the schools]. Our context of poverty has other priority challenges.

Leonardo: One of his ideas is that society be heard, but how to achieve it?

Freixo: Rio has to be a space for dialogue to bring popular wisdom to public policies. We will do it through schools, using technology to reach the whole of society. This will also help us confront the criminality that dominates the lives of people and territories, but without violating rights, as is happening today. In addition, to achieve this we will modernize the police and boost the intelligence services.

All of Rio's indices are worse than the national average. The unemployment rate is 14.9% [against the national average of 11.1%]. We lost 700,000 formal jobs and industry, which represented 18% of GDP in 2000, today represents 6%. In addition, the militias and drug traffickers impose extra costs of living on the population. For example, they control 80% of the sales of gas cylinders, all this in a macro context in which more than half of the jobs are likely to disappear. The solution lies in educating for the jobs of the future, creating local currencies, activating family farming, developing solidarity economies and social assistance policies. We also need to create

a spirit of solidarity and understanding in companies. The search for a fairer society must become a real priority for all. I am not defending charity, which is vertical, from top to bottom; yes projects and public policy of solidarity, which is horizontal, between equals.

Leonardo: What about the environmental dimension?

Freixo: Among other measures, we will encourage companies that activate our wind and solar potential, we will promote carbon credit markets, green bonds and the reforestation of our Atlantic forest.

Leonardo: But as the producer of 80% of the national crude, oil is strategic for Rio, isn't it?

Absolutely. We cannot ignore that oil sustains our economy: it has to make social equity viable in this extremely complex context. The last five governors were arrested. There are mafias in all sectors: energy, sports, transportation... They are organizations of power, such as militias or drug trafficking, that produce an absolutely authoritarian, illegal and violent society. Rio is unsustainable for the vast majority of its population. Therefore, even though it is a wonderful setting for a city, today it is not the "wonderful city" sung in our sambas. To be sustainable we have to work with people to break the current corrupt logic of power. We must be able to live under the 1988 constitution.

Leonardo Martins Dias carries out multi-actor sustainability projects, teaches and researches on a more authentic sustainability, currently with a focus on education

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