

As Brazilian election nears, crisis deepens for major parties

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Earlier this month, Brazil's ex-President Fernando Henrique Cardoso, leader of the PSDB (Party of Brazilian Social Democracy), wrote an open letter acknowledging that the members of the PSDB made a serious error when they kept their mouths shut in 2005. He said that at the moment in which the corruption scandals involving the ruling Workers Party (PT) and the government of President Luiz Ignacio Lula da Silva were exploding, the PSDB should have been far more forceful.

This letter constitutes an important political event: it demonstrates more clearly than ever the complete bankruptcy of the entire Brazilian political opposition and a total split within the PSDB, the party that represented the last hope of the country's ruling elite for a way out of the present political crisis based on the classic bourgeois program of national development.

In his letter, Fernando Henrique wrote: "We in the PSDB were not sufficiently firm in politically denouncing this entire disaster at the appropriate moment." In other words, he admitted the cowardice of the bourgeois opposition in 2005, when it was not able to advance a demand for the impeachment of Lula. At that time, the Brazilian presidency was tottering, besieged by denunciations of corruption, but neither the PSDB nor the majority of the so-called left had the courage to call for bringing down the government.

In the case of the PSDB and the PFL (the right-wing Party of the Liberal Front) we can understand their fears. They saw a danger of a movement of the masses coming forward as a result of the fall of the Lula government and concluded that it was not worth the risk. They believed that the exposures would turn Lula into a weak candidate in the next elections, and they were already savoring the victory that they believed they would win at the polls in 2006.

But the left also failed to pose bringing down the Lula government in 2005. Popular indignation was overwhelming, but the left kept its mouth shut as well, making criticisms and demonstrations that fell far short of what the situation demanded. What was behind this relative timidity on the part of the left? They were preparing their own bourgeois electoral project: a broad front of the "left" mobilized around the presidential candidacy of Senator Heloisa Helena, a "Christian-Trotskyist" (as she defines herself) who had recently been expelled from the PT and was the founder, along with other PT dissidents of the PSOL (Socialism and Freedom Party).

We note that Heloisa Helena is affiliated with the international revisionist current established by Michel Pablo and Ernest Mandel, which in Brazil is known as *Democracia Socialista*. Paradoxically, while she is condemning Lula, part of this current remains inside Lula's PT and, moreover, its principal leader, Raul Pont, serves as the PT's general secretary.

This year, the so-called "front of the left" became a reality, uniting three "leftist" parties. The party that clearly dominates is the PSOL, led by Heloisa Helena. This party joins together various "Trotskyist" revisionist groups as well as other groups with no pretense of a connection to Trotskyism (as with sections of *Consulta Popular*) as well as petty-

bourgeois and bourgeois opportunists who recently left the PT.

Also participating in the front of the "left" is the PSTU (Unified Socialist Workers Party), which is currently the principal section of the LIT (International Workers League), the international grouping founded by the Argentine revisionist Nahuel Moreno. The PSTU unites various trade unionists and has a certain base among the bank workers and in other sectors. While adopting a more militant posture than the PSOL, its "Marxism" is an eclectic form of centrism in which so-called Trotskyists co-exist with followers of Gramsci and Lukács.

Also participating in this front of the left is the PCB (Brazilian Communist Party) a classic form of the putrefied corpse of Stalinism, which claims no serious following outside of aging Stalinists, above all those who oriented toward the Eurocommunist trend of the 1970s.

Obviously, the "left front" which supports Heloisa Helena for the presidency is a centrist and opportunist formation with some of the classic characteristics of a popular front.

The fact is that in 2005, the so-called left as well as the right thought that there was no need to bring down Lula. In their opportunist calculations, they thought that it would be better and easier to defeat him at the polls. They made a big mistake. Lula recovered, using the state apparatus as well as those of the PT-controlled CUT (United Workers Confederation, the main Brazilian union federation) and the UNE (National Students Union), dominated by another Stalinist cadaver, the PCdoB (Communist Party of Brazil, which originated in the Maoist split from Stalinism). Also using the money and power of state enterprises (like the Brazilian petroleum company, Petrobras), increasing the resources of social aid agencies for the poor in the country's Northeast, buying intellectuals, politicians, journalists and Messianic churches, Lula was recouping—even if artificially—his prestige.

Even if he is repudiated in the major urban centers, even if he is seen as a traitor by the most organized workers and among the more politicized youth, according to the latest polls, Lula will win a clear victory in the first round of the elections which are to take place at the beginning of next month.

In the latest polls, Lula would win the first round with 56 percent of the vote—excluding blank and nullified ballots. The runner-up would be the PSDB candidate, Geraldo Alckmin, whose poll numbers register between 27 and 28 percent. Meanwhile, the poll numbers for the Left Front candidate, the PSOL's Heloisa Helena, remain at about 9 percent. If there were a second round between Lula e Alckmin, the PT president is seen as winning with 55 percent of the vote compared with 38 percent for the PSDB candidate.

As is evident, both the bourgeois parties and the petty-bourgeois left fooled themselves by adopting their opportunist posture in 2005. They decided to do nothing to bring down the Lula government and today they are facing a crisis that has its roots in their own political mistakes.

Meanwhile, new scandals have erupted in recent days, involving the PT, and perhaps, directly, the president himself, Lula. The minister of the

Supreme Electoral Tribunal, Marco Aurélio de Mello, declared on September 19 that the issues are very serious and could call into question the candidacy of Lula. The PT appears to have bought for close to \$1 million a series of false documents to manufacture charges against the PSDB presidential candidate Alckmin and José Serra, the party's candidate for governor of São Paulo. Besides this, on September 17, taps were discovered on the telephones of three ministers on the Supreme Electoral Tribunal.

As the minister Marco Aurélio de Mello said this week, it is still early to know all the facts of charges that are just now being investigated by the tribunal, but an investigation of the president himself is not ruled out, even after he records a victory at the polls.

Lula has declared himself disgusted and has insinuated that the charges are a fabrication aimed at toppling him. He reached the point of saying that, if it were necessary, he would seek the direct support of the masses. Whatever the case, it appears unlikely that these new charges will alter the results of the coming election.

The fact is that the corruption scandals and gangsterism involving the politicians of every party are not ending. Recently, a journalist, Fernando Rodrigues, conducted an investigation in which he showed that in four years, the politicians had managed to increase their own personal wealth by nearly 90 percent, an extraordinary figure.

In his letter, Fernando Henrique Cardoso lamented: "We will not be able to arouse the population now during the election campaign. But, to differentiate ourselves from the reigning putrefaction, we have a moral obligation not to remain silent." In other words Fernando Henrique is already acknowledging the inevitable defeat of Alckmin, the PSDB candidate, and is making a kind of "moral appeal." This sounds like just one more accusation against the leadership of the PSDB, which will continue its habitual cowardice and silence.

Thus, in the case of Fernando Henrique Cardoso and the PSDB, what emerges is the deepening demoralization of the bourgeois opposition in the face of Lula, who, allied with big finance capital and still able to muster mass support, is able to rule with a large measure of independence from the regional bourgeoisie. This independence finds expression in his ability to break the rules of state institutions in his second term even more arbitrarily than in his first, when he already governed by seducing the corrupt congress, the masses and sections of intellectuals with posts, public funds and the advantages of power.

As could already be seen in the first half of 2005, we are living through a profound crisis of bourgeois rule in Brazil. The bourgeoisie is no longer able to govern in the same way in which it has ruled the country since the fall of the military dictatorship 20 years ago. The PT government has shown itself to be the same or worse than all that occurred during this period under Sarney, Collor and Fernando Henrique. No new, more consistent project has emerged, either from the left or the right.

Alckmin, the candidate of PSDB and ex-governor of the state of São Paulo, proposes reviving the "developmentalist" project of the Brazilian bourgeoisie from the 1950s, like that of President Juscelino Kubitschek, the founder of Brasília and of the Brazilian auto industry. Obviously, he has been able to gain little credibility within big business circles, which prefer the Bonapartist rule of Lula as the best guardian of social stability.

But even worse is the draft program put forward by the Front of the Left headed by Heloísa Helena. Written by César Benjamin, the candidate for vice-president on Heloísa's ticket, the draft presents the same "developmentalist" project as Alckmin, distinguished only by a few more reformist elements. As with the PSDB, the Front of the Left proposes magical solutions for the country's development: lowering interest rates, reforming this and reforming that, but without any structural transformation.

In particular, the Front of the Left does not propose socialism. As Heloísa Helena openly states, socialism is part of her party's program, but

it is not part of her program for government. Socialism, according to her, can only be thought of as something for the distant future.

Recently, Eduardo Almeida, the leader of the PSTU, despite his party's participation in the Front of the Left, wrote a criticism of this program drafted by César Benjamin. But in his criticism, he does not make it clear that its political line is not that solely of César Benjamin, but that of Heloísa Helena herself and the majority of the Front of the Left. In all of her interviews and statements, Heloísa Helena presents exactly this national-reformist line: suggesting a lowering of interest rates, making this or that small reform; as if such measures could resolve the structural crisis of Brazilian capitalism, a crisis that is, without any doubt, inseparable from the structural crisis of Latin American and world capitalism.

Thus, Eduardo Almeida, as the leader of PSTU, should have been polemicalizing not just against César Benjamin, but against the PSTU itself. Eduardo Almeida should have asked his comrades in the PSTU and himself, "What is the PSTU doing inside the Front of the Left?" And also, "Is the PSTU an accomplice in this popular-front program that serves to block the movement of the workers and the youth?" And further, "Does the PSTU also distinguish the program for the government from the program of the party?"

It appears that the PSTU is drawing continuously closer to these positions of the PSOL. In this way, the PSTU recently launched its proposal for a program for the Front of the Left. Outside of one or another reminiscence of Trotsky's Transitional Program, the proposal of the PSTU is also a program for government, and that of a bourgeois government. Socialism appears to be reserved only for holiday speeches.

As the more lucid renegade, the sociologist Francisco Weffort—founder and ex-secretary general of the PT, and later minister of culture under Fernando Henrique—declared recently, "It is obvious that the parties that we have are incapable of generating plans for the country . . . It is clear that economic policy remains under the control of finance capital." (*Folha de São Paulo*, September 10).

What remains for the workers and the youth, in the face of the decadent Social Democracy of Fernando Henrique e Alckmin, in the face of the PT of Lula, in the face of the PSOL of Heloísa Helena and of the PSTU, which has united with the PSOL?

Given that the latest scandals do not have graver consequences, Lula will probably be reelected to govern with the support, on the one hand, of the more backward layers of the masses, and, on the other, of finance capital. In this case, he will exercise power not in the traditional forms of Brazilian bourgeois democracy that arose in the wake of the dictatorship. Lula has already evolved, and will possibly deepen this evolution towards a Bonapartist government.

In this respect, Weffort says of his ex-comrade: "From Lula I expect nothing, and I only hope that the demoralization to which he has led the state does not give way to an institutional crisis." In fact, nothing can be expected from any of the existing parties, and from Lula one can only expect an evolution towards authoritarianism.

Given this political situation, what is to be done today in Brazil? In this election the only thing that remains is to cast a blank ballot (*voto nulo*) and begin to build a new organization for the workers and youth. But certainly, given urgency and seriousness of the moment, it is not just a question of building a new institutional party, something which is a very difficult and slow process in Brazil. The authoritarian legislation seeks precisely to block the creation of new parties.

To achieve ballot status in Brazil, the legislation demands 400,000 signatures obtained from various states throughout the country. For an organization founded on programmatic principles, gathering this number of signatures on a national scale takes a matter of years. The PSOL, which began its signature campaign with the support of various federal deputies and senators (those who left the PT), took two years to meet this requirement.

Beyond this, in the electoral process this year, a new law has come into effect which provides that only those parties that win 5 percent of the vote in the election for federal deputies will have the right to party representation in the Chamber of Deputies. To be recognized as valid, parties must also elect representatives in nine states.

To get an idea of the difficulty this imposes, if this measure had been in effect in the 2002 election, only seven parties would have won a sufficient percentage to survive: the PT (18.38 percent), PSDB (14.32 percent), PFL (13.37 percent), PMDB (13.35 percent), PPB (7.81 percent), PSB (5.27 percent) and PDT (5.12 percent). Those that would have disappeared from the political scene include the PTB (4.63 percent) and the PCdoB (2.25 percent), which have been recognized for decades. Thus, both the PSOL and the PCdoB, whose leader Aldo Rebelo is the current president of the federal Chamber of Deputies, are threatened with disappearance.

Given this situation, it is necessary to begin the struggle by other means. If in this election there is no alternative outside of casting a blank ballot, the agitation for such a ballot must be transformed into the launching of a new organization. In this sense, it is necessary to organize workers, the unemployed and sections of the youth into committees that are being set up throughout Brazil to fight for a blank ballot.

According to recent polls conducted by the Datafolha institute, the campaign for a blank ballot has grown more than any other tendency since the last election, with popular support for it increasing 500 percent in relation to the election of 2002. Committees for a blank ballot have arisen in various regions of the city of Sao Paulo and in various other cities across the country, including Osasco, Santo André, São Bernardo, Taboão, Embu, Francisco Morato, Franco da Rocha, Bauru, Rio de Janeiro, Santos, Araraquara, Toledo, Cascavel, Maceió, Belém and Salvador.

This process of organizing workers, unemployed and youth is the only possible independent response to elections dominated by right-wing bourgeois parties and treacherous reformist parties such as the PT and PSOL, is not only a matter of revolt against this entire process, but is laying the foundations for a new form of independent working class organization.



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