

15,000 take to streets of Sao Paulo against Bush, as protest leaders defend Lula

Rodrigo Brancher in Sao Paulo
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Various protests erupted throughout Brazil to mark the visit of US President George W. Bush to the country on Thursday, March 8.

In Sao Paulo, the demonstration took over Avenida Paulista, one of the principal streets of the city and a major financial center of the country. The demonstrators, who numbered over 15,000, continued the protest for four hours. Taking part were various left-wing parties as well as a number of organizations that support the Lula government, such as the Workers Party (PT); the Communist Party of Brazil (PCdoB); the United Workers Central (CUT), the country's main trade union federation; the National Union of Students; and the Movement of Landless Rural Workers (MST).

A number of members of the ruling Workers Party took part. The party used the coincidence of Bush's arrival with International Women's Day to focus the protest on feminism. Female members of the PT dressed in purple gave equal billing to slogans denouncing domestic violence, demanding equality between the sexes and opposing Bush's aggression in Iraq. But they said not a word about Lula and his open support for the policies of the US president.

For many, the presence of the PT in the demonstration was difficult to understand. One protester told the WSW, "The presence of these people from the PT in the demonstration is strange. In the end, wasn't it Lula himself of the PT who invited Bush to come to Brazil?"

Clearly, neither Lula nor the PT are against Bush's visit to Brazil and Latin America. They are not opposed to the agreements and deals that Bush and his advisors came to negotiate with the government and Brazilian big business. On the contrary, Lula and the PT have made extensive efforts to guarantee the American president a tranquil and productive visit.

Under the veil of an agreement on biofuel are hidden deals that involve, for example, George Bush's brother, Jeb, the former governor of Florida, and the Brazilian businessman and Lula's ex-agricultural minister Roberto Rodrigues. Both are chairs of the Interamerican Ethanol Commission, which is seeking to promote a sector expected to generate over a trillion dollars in revenue over the next 25 years.

With Bush's visit, Lula claims to be "advancing relations between the two countries," which means making Brazilian territory more and more open to exploitation by international capital.

So how can the presence of the PT members in the protest against Bush be explained? What at first might appear as a manifestation of a conflict over policy within the party is in reality a demonstration of how the PT serves as an essential prop of the government itself.

Ever since Lula was elected in 2002, there have been very few times at which the PT or its government allies could take to the streets without placing at risk the stability of the whole precarious government. On the contrary, the various organizations controlled by and allied with the Workers Party received subsidies from the government—the so-called *mensalinho*—to expand their propaganda capabilities in order to better position themselves in support of the government and to block the growing popular dissatisfaction and possible revolts against Lula. This was the case above all in 2005, at the highpoint of the revelations concerning corruption in the government, when some 70 million reais (US\$25 million) were passed out to the CUT, the UNE and the MST.

Meanwhile, with the accelerating reduction in the standard of living of the working class, the mass layoffs being carried out by various sections of industry, with the unemployment rate continuously rising and with an

insignificant growth in the Brazilian economy, the dissatisfaction of the workers is growing every day, above all in the big urban centers. In the face of this unrest, the PT itself feels obliged to feign militancy at every opportunity in which such a pretense of struggle will pose no threat to the government or big business.

This was the case at the anti-Bush demonstration carried out Thursday in the streets of Sao Paulo. Despite bringing together close to 15,000 people, in general Brazilians are revolted by both Bush and Lula and his PT. The demonstration had a largely conciliatory character and offered little in the way of opposition to the government.

At the same time, the overwhelming reaction of the press was to focus on the popular dissatisfaction with Bush's visit, while making no connection with his presence and the policies of his host and faithful ally, Lula.

The tactic adopted by the government parties and by the leadership of the protest was clear: with government money and little mass support, they controlled the sound trucks, excluding any denunciations of Lula. They brought and distributed posters en masse, making their political influence appear far greater than it really was, and they agitated solely on the slogan of "Fora Bush"—"Bush Out."

The pretense of militancy put on by these organizations for the occasion of Bush's visit is maintained solely by the mass media and by those who have been integrated into them for a long period, becoming ever more distant from the streets, the factories, the schools and universities.

The large numbers who turned out for the protest express, above all, the growing anger of the Brazilian workers and youth against Bush, Lula and the imperialist policies of big international capital. Within the demonstration, there was a sizeable group organized by *Conlute* (National Coordination of Struggle, a dissident union front) that shouted slogans demanding "Bush out Iraq, Lula out of Haiti," linking, even if in timid way, the Lula government with the policies of Bush.

Also participating was the youth group *Negacao da Negacao* (Negation of the Negation) with close to 350 people gathered under banners reading, "Down with the fascist alliance of Lula-Bush" and "No to the dirty biofuel deal." To the beat of a *maracatu* band, these

youth chanted, "Lula e Bush nao! Abaixo a repressao! [Lula and Bush no! Down with the repression!]" They carried placards reading, "Defend rights of workers throughout the world."

The more that Lula and the PT and the PCdoB try to maintain the hypocritical farce that they represent parties of the so-called "left," every day it becomes clearer to the Brazilian workers and youth that Lula's government rules on behalf of the bourgeoisie and international capital and against the interest of workers throughout the world.



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