

Brazil's Workers Party faces tightest election in over a decade

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With less than three weeks before the first round in Brazil's presidential election, the latest opinion polls indicate that a projected runoff between incumbent PT (Partido dos Trabalhadores—Workers Party) President Dilma Rousseff and her challenger PSB (Partido Socialista Brasileira—Brazilian Socialist Party) candidate Marina Silva is too close to call.

While last month Rousseff seemed to be coasting toward an easy victory, continuing over a decade of PT rule, the ruling party's electoral prospects were upended by the August 13 plane crash that claimed the life of the PSB's presidential candidate, Eduardo Campos. The PSB chose Silva, who had been his vice-presidential running mate, as his replacement.

A poll released Tuesday showed support for Silva rising even as backing for Rousseff fell. According to its findings, Rousseff would win 36 percent of the votes in the first round, followed by 30 percent for Silva and 19 percent for Aécio Neves, the candidate of the PSDB (Brazilian Social Democratic Party), the traditional standard-bearer of the Brazilian right, who has been relegated to third place by Silva's candidacy. In a runoff, Silva was projected to win 43 percent, and Rousseff 40 percent.

The rise of Silva is ultimately a manifestation of the broad dissatisfaction and hostility toward the PT, which has held power since the 2003 election of Lula—the former metalworkers union leader Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva—as president in 2003.

This found its most powerful expression in the massive protest demonstrations that erupted across the country in June of last year, sparked first by hikes in transit fares, but rapidly incorporating anger over the lack of decent jobs, education and health care under conditions in which billions were being lavished on preparations for the World Cup football matches.

While demonstrations on this scale have not been repeated, popular discontent has only deepened under conditions in which the Brazilian economy has contracted for two consecutive quarters—signaling the onset of recession—and

inflation has hit 7 percent.

Silva has cast herself as an antiestablishment figure, fighting against corruption and for a “new politics” that is “neither left nor right.”

The financial markets have tracked her rise closely, with Brazil's Ibovespa stock index rising in tandem with her poll numbers. Despite her posturing as a political outsider, Brazilian finance capital clearly sees her candidacy as a vehicle for its interests.

Much like Lula, whose family came from Brazil's impoverished northeast to São Paulo, where he found work in the auto industry, Marina Silva, the offspring of oppressed rubber-tappers in the Amazonian state of Acre, has been able to use her personal history to appeal for support.

A leftist in her youth, Marina Silva joined the Workers Party, winning election as a federal senator and then serving as environment minister in Lula's first government. There, her personal background served as a convenient cover for policies that furthered the greatest environmental depredations in the country's history.

She resigned from the PT in 2008 and then ran as the Green Party (PV) candidate in 2010, declaring her desire to be “the first black woman of poor origin” to become president of Brazil. Her running mate was Brazilian billionaire Guilherme Peirao Leal, whose Natura Cosmetics corporation has been denounced for “biopiracy” for seeking to trademark fruits traditionally used by the country's indigenous population and for exploiting poorly paid workers.

Similarly, this time around, she has surrounded herself with wealthy members of Brazil's ruling establishment. The Brazilian Socialist Party itself has nothing to do with socialism, serving as a political vehicle for wealthy agricultural interests in the northeast and family political dynasties, while forging electoral pacts with both the ruling PT and the right-wing opposition PSDB.

Picked as her running mate after Silva was named the PSB's presidential candidate was Beto Albuquerque, a federal deputy from Rio Grande do Sul, who was apparently

selected for his close ties to agribusiness. His other major backers include the Brazilian alcoholic beverages industry and the country's arms manufacturers.

Her closest adviser is multimillionaire banking heir and philanthropist Maria Alice Setubal, whose family controls Banco Itau, the largest bank in the southern hemisphere. She is expected to play a prominent role in any Silva government. Recently, she stated in a television interview: "Marina believes in the importance of [Brazil's] Central Bank autonomy, she is surrounding herself with people who understand the markets and she is committed to gain the trust of the financial establishment."

In response to the challenge from Silva, Dilma Rousseff has largely avoided any direct attack on the clear subordination of her candidacy to the interests of big business, something which the PT shares, instead claiming that she lacks clear policies, is inexperienced and that her ties to the evangelical church represent a threat to social rights. Dilma herself, it must be pointed out, has repeatedly bowed to pressure from Brazil's potent evangelical political bloc, running in 2010 as an opponent of abortion.

Earlier this month, Dilma told interviewers that if she wins a second term it would mean "a new government, a new team." Presidential aides told the Brazilian daily *Folha de Sao Paulo* that the changes, which are likely to include the sacking of Finance Minister Guido Mantega, would be effected "to bring her government closer to the business sector."

If Rousseff is voted out, it will be the result of the intense political contradictions besetting the PT, which was founded more than three decades ago in large measure by elements claiming to be socialists and even Trotskyists, and which was embraced by pseudo-left layers all over the world as a model for political action.

Moving ever further to the right, the PT became the intensely corrupt political instrument of the predominant sections of Brazilian finance and industrial capital, alienating the industrial working class that it had once claimed to represent. Its appeal to the Brazilian ruling class was as a means of diverting and containing social upheavals from below, in large measure through minimal social assistance programs. With the eruptions in the streets of the country last year, however, its usefulness in this regard seems also to be waning.

Also running in October's election are two pseudo-left parties, the PSOL (Party of Socialism and Freedom) and the PSTU (Unified Socialist Workers' Party). The former was founded in 2003 by a group of PT parliamentarians who were expelled for opposing a pension reform enacted by the Lula government, while the latter was established by the Brazilian Morenoite tendency after it was thrown out of the

PT in 1992.

PSOL, which includes tendencies tied to Morenoism and to the Pabloite United Secretariat, essentially seeks to resurrect the original policies of the PT, while PSTU has repeatedly sought to unify with PSOL in an electoral "Left Front." The last time it was able to cobble together such a front on the national scale was in 2006, when its presidential candidate, Heloisa Helena, a member of the Pabloite tendency, won nearly 7 percent of the vote. In 2010, running separate candidates, the PSOL won 0.9 percent of the vote, while PSTU polled 0.08 percent.

In the present election, while also running separate presidential candidates, Luciana Genero for PSOL and Ze Maria for PSTU, the two parties have concluded agreements on common "Left Front" slates in some states.

The most prominent of these is in Alagoas, one of Brazil's poorest states and a center of the sugarcane industry, where PSOL's Heloisa Helena is running for senator against Brazil's former president Fernando Collor.

While formally proclaiming support for a "workers government" and political independence, Helena has forged an alliance with the right-wing PSDB, the principal party of the sugar barons, accepting its political support and appearing together with its gubernatorial candidate. It is suspected that she may also end up backing Silva for president. The two are close political allies, and both are evangelicals.

PSTU responded to these rotten political maneuvers by reaffirming its subordination to the "Left Front" and appealing to Helena and PSOL to do likewise. "It isn't possible to present an alternative for the workers in this way," the Morenoites declared, more in sorrow than in anger. The words are a self-indictment of PSTU itself.



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