

Marina Silva backs candidate of Brazilian right against Workers Party

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With just two weeks till the second round vote in Brazil's presidential election, the candidate of the PSDB (Brazilian Social Democracy Party), Aécio Neves, is running neck and neck in most polls against Workers Party incumbent President Dilma Rousseff. Polls have shown the two candidates in a statistical dead heat.

In what had been an anticipated blow against the PT and Rousseff, the candidate who ran third and was eliminated in the first round of the election, Marina Silva, announced her endorsement of Neves Sunday. She claimed the candidate of Brazil's right-wing opposition party had made "commitments" to incorporate sections of Silva's own program—maintenance of social welfare programs, land reform, environmentalism, etc.—into his political agenda.

A former environmental minister in the PT government and a member of the PT for nearly a quarter century, Silva left the party to run as the presidential candidate of the Green Party in 2010. She was then elevated this year from the vice-presidential running mate to top of the ticket of the Socialist Party after its initial presidential candidate, Eduardo Campos, was killed in a plane crash. She won 21.3 percent of the vote.

Silva had cast herself as the candidate of "change," attempting to appeal to the widespread dissatisfaction with the PT and the other traditional parties that found dramatic expression in the mass protests that brought millions into the streets in June 2013 over transit fare hikes, inadequate public services and vast spending on the World Cup games. At the same time, she carried favor with big business and banking interests that saw Silva, who came from an impoverished rubber-tapping family in the Amazonas region, as an effective front for

pursuing their interests.

In announcing her endorsement, Silva drew a telling parallel with 2002, when the PT first gained the presidency under the former metalworkers union leader Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva. When Lula took office, she said, he "had an economically stabilized country" thanks to the IMF-dictated neo-liberal "reforms" introduced by his PSDB predecessor, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, who was president from 1994 to 2002. The PT president, she added, had introduced policies aimed at "social inclusion" while living up to the promises made by Cardoso to Brazilian big business.

Neves, she suggested, would act in a similar fashion, keeping in place such minimal social assistance programs for Brazil's poorest introduced under the PT, like *Bolsa Familia*, while maintaining the continuity of capitalist economic policies pursued by both parties in the interests of the big banks and corporations.

Contributing to Rousseff's declining political fortunes—with the lowest poll numbers since the PT came to power a dozen years ago—are the continuing revelations concerning a massive kickback scandal at Petrobras, the state-owned energy conglomerate, which is the largest company in all of South America.

In an attempt to win himself a lighter sentence for corruption and money laundering charges, ex-Petrobras director Paulo Roberto Costa has testified that every contractor who worked for the energy giant paid 3 percent of the value of their contract in kickbacks, most of which were funneled directly into the coffers of the Workers Party.

Last Wednesday, Costa told the Brazilian Court of Justice that he brought the money directly to the treasurer of the PT, Joao Vaccari Neto, meeting him at hotels in Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo and even in the

party official's own home. Lesser amounts were said to have gone to the PT's political partners, the PMDB (Brazilian Democratic Movement Party) and the Progressive Party (PP).

Costa said that every company seeking contracts with Petrobras paid the kickback for fear of losing out to the competition. "During my time there," he said, "I don't recall any one company missing a payment." According to an analysis done by the Brazilian media, these political kickbacks amount to a staggering \$3.8 billion. On one project alone, a Petrobras refinery in the northeastern state of Pernambuco, the kickback was nearly \$30 million.

While corruption has been pervasive under all the parties, including in the state of Minas Gerais, when Neves was governor there, the Brazilian right has turned the revelations into an effective political weapon against the PT.

In a significant signal, Neves' top economic adviser stated last Friday that if the PSDB candidate won, the Brazilian government would be "getting much closer to the US."

"We are keen to move back to a broader, more open approach to foreign policy," Antonio Fraga, a former Brazilian central bank chief who is slated to become finance minister should Neves win, told investors in a teleconference with investors held in conjunction with the International Monetary Fund and World Bank meetings in Washington last week.

Over the past year, relations between Brasilia and Washington hit a low point with former NSA analyst Edward Snowden's revelations of systematic spying on Rousseff, including her cellphones and those of her top aides, as well as on Petrobras.

Sections of the pseudo-left in Brazil have seized upon the apparently more pro-US posture of Neves and the PSDB to justify support for the PT in the second round.

In reality, the Rousseff government has been cautious not to clash with Washington over its fundamental interests. To the extent it has pursued a nationalist agenda, it has been in the interests of Brazilian capital. The government rebuffed, for example, the widespread demand that Snowden be given asylum in Brazil.

US administrations under both Bush and Obama have generally treated the PT government as the "responsible left," counterposing it to the Chavez-Maduro government in Venezuela, and seeking to

collaborate with it in pursuing its interests in the hemisphere. This included the dispatch of Brazilian armed forces to relieve US Marines who had been occupying Haiti following the US-orchestrated overthrow of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide in 2004.



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