

Brazil's Workers Party faces its tightest election after 12 years in power

Bill Van Auken
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Only three days before Brazil's second-round presidential election October 26, incumbent Dilma Rousseff of the PT (Partido dos Trabalhadores—Workers Party) continued to widen her lead in the polls over the candidate of the Brazilian right, Aécio Neves of the PSDB (Brazilian Social Democracy Party).

IBOPE, Brazil's major polling agency, showed Rousseff leading with 54 percent of the vote, against 46 percent for Neves. Whatever the final results, the PT appears to be facing its closest election since coming to power 12 years ago with the election of former metalworkers union leader Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva.

Thursday's poll results are the latest phase in a series of sharp shifts that have taken place since the beginning of the election campaign, in which a third candidate, former PT environmental minister Marina Silva of the Brazilian Socialist Party, had been forecast at one point to be the top vote-getter, only to finish a distant third with barely 20 percent of the ballots cast.

Rousseff won 41.59 percent of the valid ballots in the first round on October 5, compared to 33.55 percent for Neves. Just a week ago, however, the polls showed Neves leading Rousseff by 51 percent to 49 percent, an effective dead heat.

The sharp gyrations are symptomatic of a Brazilian electorate that is growing increasingly dissatisfied with the prevailing social conditions—a mood that found powerful expression in June of last year when millions took to the streets to protest against deteriorating healthcare, education and public transportation, in contrast to the massive expenditures on the football World Cup.

At the same time, neither candidate offers any prospect of improvement in these conditions. The PT, despite its occasional left pretensions and demagogic

populist appeals, like the PSDB, is a political instrument of finance capital and big business, defending their profits against the social interests of the working class.

It is the general consensus within ruling financial circles that, whichever party wins the election, the next government will carry out a program of economic adjustments directed at imposing austerity upon the working class and increasing profitability for Brazilian and foreign capital.

Rousseff has campaigned on the slogan of “new government, new ideas,” without spelling out what changes she intends to make in a second term. The only certainty is that she is replacing her finance minister, Guido Mantega. While the official story is that Mantega is leaving for “personal reasons,” he has been the focus of attacks by those charging the government with failure to pursue sufficiently “investor-friendly” policies.

Driving the demand for change—a word that has an entirely different meaning for Brazilian workers, on the one hand, and the financial and corporate oligarchy, on the other—is the drift of the economy into stagflation, with a projected annual growth rate this year of just 0.27 percent and prices rising by 6.5 percent. Responding to growing anger over rising food prices, Rousseff's secretary for economic policy advised people complaining about the high price of beef to eat chicken or eggs instead.

The PT has campaigned on the slogan of “*mudança com segurança*,” or “change with security,” counterposing it to what it charges would be “radical change” under a Neves presidency.

Much of the PT campaign has sought to contrast present conditions in Brazil with those that prevailed the last time the PSDB held the presidency under

Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1995 to 2003), when the government implemented a program of neo-liberal reforms, including sweeping privatizations of state-owned enterprises and subordination of the government's fiscal policy to meeting payments on the foreign debt.

Rousseff and her supporters suggest that a return to power by the PSDB would mean a return to the conditions of 11 percent unemployment that existed under Cardoso and a scrapping of the minimal social assistance programs, such as *Bolsa Familia*, implemented under the PT.

The reality, however, is that PT governments, under both Lula and Dilma, have pursued economic policies that are in continuity with those of Cardoso, who himself implemented minimal assistance programs for the poorest sections of the population. Changes in terms of employment and reduction of poverty levels are primarily a product not of any innovations of the PT, but rather external factors. These include rising commodity prices, driven in large measure by growing demand by China for Brazilian agricultural and mineral resources, as well as increased foreign investment.

While Rousseff's predecessor, Lula, once boasted that Brazil was immune to the world financial crisis that began in 2008, it is increasingly clear this is not the case. While the official unemployment rate remains relatively low, new job creation is stalled and in a number of key sectors, including auto and auto parts production, layoffs and plant shutdowns are steadily rising. And, according to figures released last month, which were subsequently "corrected," Brazil's income inequality rate, which is among the highest in the world, is once again on the rise.

The daily *Folha de Sao Paulo* reported Thursday that the Rousseff government is holding back statistics in a number of key social sectors until after the election. These include the poverty rate, which is expected to rise, tax revenues, which are expected to fall, and the rate of deforestation in the Amazon region, which according to one NGO's estimate, has risen 190 percent.

Sections of the Brazilian pseudo-left, including elements who played a significant role in founding the PT and using it to divert the revolutionary offensive of the Brazilian working class into the safe channels of bourgeois politics, are intervening to demand that

workers turn out to vote for Rousseff on October 26.

In some cases this is done with the shamefaced slogan of supporting the "lesser evil." The Movement of the Socialist Left, a Morenoite tendency operating in the PSOL (Party of Socialism and Freedom), which was founded by elements expelled from the PT, insisted that one must choose between "having your arm amputated with anesthetic" or having it amputated without. Either way, as far as this tendency is concerned, the Brazilian working class must accept dismemberment.



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