

Brazil's right-wing protests: A warning to the working class

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Media reports on Sunday's right-wing protests in Brazil calling for the ouster of Workers Party (Partido dos Trabalhadores—PT) President Dilma Rousseff estimate the turnout at anywhere between one million and two million people.

While these head counts are likely inflated for political reasons, the protests nevertheless underscore the intense class polarization that exists in Brazil, as well as the political dangers posed to the Brazilian working class.

Folha de S. Paulo, Brazil's largest circulation daily and by no means unsympathetic to the right-wing politics of the demonstration, described Sunday's actions as "a protest of a rich, well-tended Brazil" driven by concerns over the "continuous inflation of services" ranging from "housekeepers to parking in the middle class Vila Madelena neighborhood, as well as private schools and health insurance." The protests were noteworthy for raising no social demands whatsoever.

Analyses of the organizations behind the demonstration, particularly the online "Free Brazil Movement" (Movimento Brasil Livre) and "Vem Pra Rua" (Come into the Streets), have linked their inspiration and funding to right-wing groups run by the billionaire Koch brothers in the US and Brazil's own billionaires.

The Vem Pra Rua web site was traced to the Estudar Foundation created by Jorge Paulo Lemann, Brazil's richest capitalist. Lemann's PR agency told the WSWs that the identification of the site with Lemann was a "misunderstanding" and that its creation had been the "isolated initiative of an employee, which doesn't work for us anymore."

Both the American and the Brazilian billionaires backing the protests have seized upon the ballooning

bribery and kickback scandal at Petrobras in no small measure because they hope it will serve as a vehicle for their own enrichment through the complete privatization of the state-owned oil corporation.

The mobilization of hundreds of thousands of people under the anti-communist banners of the political right is unprecedented in recent Brazilian history. One has to go back more than half a century to March 1964, when protests organized under the slogan "Marches of the Family with God for Freedom" (Marchas da Família com Deus pela Liberdade) brought hundreds of thousands of middle class Brazilians into the streets as part of a coordinated campaign to prepare the US-backed military coup that took place the following month.

The right-wing protests of that period were organized to bring down a bourgeois nationalist government under President Joao Goulart, who had sought to implement a series of limited reforms that were wholly rejected by the ruling oligarchy and its US imperialist patrons.

Last Sunday's protests were aimed at driving out a PT government that has carried out financial policies dictated by Wall Street and Brazilian capital, while maintaining minimal social assistance programs, such as *bolsa familia*, designed to quell discontent among the country's poorest layers. The Brazilian bourgeoisie and those sections of the middle class closest to it view even this minor diversion of resources as an intolerable drain on the profits and wealth of the rich.

Sunday's demonstrations included the prominent participation of fascistic elements calling for the military to overthrow Rousseff, including signs in English clearly directed at securing US support for another coup.

The Brazilian military dictatorship had been

discredited by its record of savage repression, killings and torture during its more than 20 years in power. If right-wing forces can once again openly agitate for a military coup, it is thanks to the reactionary role of the PT and the various pseudo-left groups that have sought to promote illusions in this thoroughly capitalist party. Together, for more than three decades, they have worked to prevent any independent struggle by the Brazilian working class.

The political crisis presently unfolding in Brazil is the end product of a protracted process that began with the founding of the PT in 1980, with Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, a leader of the metalworkers union, at its head.

At the time, a host of petty-bourgeois lefts promoted the PT as a new “democratic” and Brazilian road to socialism, based upon the politics of national reformism and trade unionism. Various groups, including those affiliated to revisionist tendencies that had broken with the Fourth International, did their best to liquidate themselves into the PT, proclaiming it a viable substitute for the building of an international revolutionary party. The Pabloite United Secretariat went so far as to insist that the PT’s “very existence produces a dynamic that substantially reduces the possibility of class collaboration.”

The ensuing years saw the PT register increasing electoral successes while moving steadily to the right, until it finally won the presidency for Lula in 2002, a position it has held for 12 years. The PT became the preferred instrument of rule of the Brazilian bourgeoisie, loyally carrying out the dictates of the IMF and both international and Brazilian capital. In the process, the PT’s leadership, including ex-student radicals, trade unionists and former guerrillas, underwent a transformation in their lifestyles and bank accounts, amassing millions through various corrupt schemes.

This has reached its apogee in the Petrobras scandal, with charges that some \$4 billion was looted from the company to secure inflated contracts for private firms that, in turn, paid kickbacks into the campaign coffers and private accounts of the PT and its political allies.

Among the nearly 60 politicians charged in the affair are Antonio Palocci, former finance minister and chief of staff to Rousseff, who began his political life as a member of the OSI (International Socialist Organization), affiliated to the French OCI of Pierre

Lambert. Also charged Monday was João Vaccari Neto, the PT treasurer, who was formerly president of the bank workers union and a leading figure in the CUT union federation. Acting as Rousseff’s chief spokesman in relation to the scandal is Miguel Rosseto, long a leading member of the Brazilian Pabloite group affiliated to the United Secretariat.

In the midst of the revelations of pervasive corruption, the Rousseff government is plowing ahead with drastic austerity measures attacking social spending and basic rights of the working class. Layoffs are mounting, prices are soaring, and Brazil remains one of the most economically polarized countries in the world.

If, under these conditions, the right is able to mobilize in the streets of Brazil, it is because the so-called “left,” orbiting the PT, a right-wing political instrument of the bourgeoisie, is not a vehicle for social struggle or even opposition, but rather part of the existing capitalist setup, tasked with containing and suppressing the workers’ struggles.

This raises similar dangers as those posed in France, where the National Front is able to appeal to social discontent because of the reactionary role played by the pro-business Socialist Party of François Hollande, backed by petty-bourgeois pseudo-left groups such as the New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA). In Greece, the lightning fast capitulation to the international banks by Syriza, a bourgeois party promoted by pseudo-left groups internationally, provides an opening for fascistic forces such as Golden Dawn.

The decisive question posed is that of revolutionary leadership in the working class. In Brazil, this means fighting to win the workers to a program of socialism and internationalism, combined with a ruthless political struggle against the Workers Party and all those pseudo-left groups and unions that are in its orbit. These tasks can be carried out only through the building of a section of the International Committee of the Fourth International.



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