

Brazil's pseudo-left in crisis after ouster of PT government

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As Brazilians confront the reality of last month's ouster of Dilma Rousseff's PT (Workers Party) government and the anti-working class policies that are now being imposed, the country's pseudo-left groups are in deep crisis.

Historically, all of them orbited the PT—a bourgeois party—its affiliated CUT union federation and government-connected “social movements.” Now, however, they are divided between those defending the ousted government and those adapting themselves to the right-wing movements that were the real social base of the process leading to Rousseff's suspension and probable impeachment.

The new government, led by Rousseff's former vice president Michel Temer, has formed the most reactionary cabinet since the fall of the US-backed military dictatorship in 1985. Haunted by the specter of the Lava-Jato (Car Wash) investigation of the bribes-for-contracts scandal at the state-owned oil giant Petrobras, the cabinet has already lost two key ministers.

Romero Jucá has quit his post as economic planning minister after being caught on tape discussing the prospect that Rousseff's ouster might dampen public support for the investigation and rescue leading politicians charged with corruption. Days later, Fabiano Silveira, minister of transparency and control, quit after being taped counseling the president of the Senate, Renan Calheiros, on how to derail investigations targeting him.

More importantly, the government, which has taken office with pledges to impose the full burden of Brazil's economic crisis on the working class, has been embroiled in one “gaffe” after another, with ministers speaking their minds regarding the extent and brutality of budget cuts and the scaling back of social rights and poverty relief programs, only to be publicly criticized by Temer, who is deeply worried about provoking a social explosion.

Workers and youth are showing the first signs of resistance, with teachers, university professors and non-teaching staff strikes against salary and budget cuts, together with school and campus occupations hitting five states.

Meanwhile, the main anti-Temer demonstrations have seen a host of pseudo-left tendencies closing ranks with the union bureaucracy nationally under the banner of the “Fearless People's Front” (Frente do Povo Sem Medo).

The Brazilian petty-bourgeois pseudo-left tendencies are all undergoing a deeply discrediting crisis. On the one hand, there are the fractions of Brazilian Morenoism, especially the PSTU (Unified Socialist Workers Party) and the PSOL (Party of Socialism and Liberty) minority, who are still waiting to reap the fruits of their light-minded support for Rousseff's removal by the right. Their perspective, akin to the watchword “after Temer, us,” is being ruthlessly exposed by events. Their adaptation to the right-wing drive for impeachment parallels their international orientation, which has included support for US imperialism's regime-change operations from Libya and Syria to Ukraine.

Other pseudo-lefts like the Lambertite PCO and the Pabloite PSOL majority have joined in street demonstrations that are largely oriented to a return of the corrupt PT government, which sought to remain in power by winning the support of the right and initiating the austerity policies that Temer is now intensifying.

All of them are united in their utter incapacity to make a class analysis of political events and their hostility to a struggle for the political independence of the working class.

It is therefore no accident that all of them are also united in promoting the professional anti-Marxist figure Guilherme Boulos, who has become a ubiquitous presence on every protest platform. Boulos uses these appearances, mainly in the city of São Paulo, to explain that the country is moving backwards after the progress of the PT years and has “returned to its old masters,” a reference to Temer's appointment of an all-white, all-male cabinet filled with millionaires.

The petty-bourgeois organizations that promote Boulos are not at all bothered by the fact that his claim to oppose the PT from the left has been exploded by his appearances at pre-impeachment government-sponsored demonstrations, many times alongside Rousseff herself. Far from opposing the PT, he has been given an even bigger role defending it since the removal of Rousseff, becoming the undisputed main spokesman for the “broad front.”

This follows his frenetic promotion over the past two years, as the Workers Party government faced a deepening crisis, and especially in the run-up to the congressional vote for impeachment. This includes a two-year-old weekly column in the country's largest newspaper, *Folha de S. Paulo*, a book released by the academic Boitempo publishing house, which also brings other anti-Marxists such as Slavoj Žižek to Brazil, invitations to innumerable high-profile seminars side by side with pro-PT, Pabloite and Morenoite professors, and countless fawning interviews by left-bourgeois, nationalist and Stalinist think tanks.

What accounts for such a favorable reception from the highest circles of power, academia, journalism and “left” politics? Essentially, it is the elaboration of a thoroughly reactionary, yet vaguely left-sounding, platform for the demoralization of the working class and the denial of its revolutionary role.

Boulos, 34, is an ostensible leader of the Homeless Workers Movement (MTST), responsible for numerous occupations of abandoned buildings and land in São Paulo state. However, he was trained at the prestigious Faculty of Philosophy of the University of São Paulo, before he specialized in Lacanian psychoanalysis.

Over the last two years, the MTST has carried out occupations that have drawn sympathy from large sections of the population suffering from real estate speculation and soaring rents in every major city. Boulos himself became the principal proponent of the tactics and perspective of “Occupy Wall Street” in Brazil.

He was granted his weekly column at *Folha de S. Paulo* almost two years ago after an MTST occupation in the rapidly gentrifying working

class neighborhood of Itaquera threatened to disrupt the 2014 World Cup games in São Paulo.

He has since used his notoriety not only to promote the “XXI century socialism” of the late Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez, but also to accuse the working class of being “alienated” by the growth of consumption under the PT’s rule. He has written off São Paulo’s substantial middle class layers as simply “fascist.”

Boulos rejects the need for a new party of the working class, saying that changes in Brazilian society will be achieved only through organizations such as his own MTST, since parties can only promote alienating practices “from high up.”

To put it bluntly, his perspective is that the Brazilian working class and the impoverished middle classes are themselves to blame for their situation in general, and for the right-wing removal of Rousseff in particular.

This outlook gives him plenty of political company. Attacking the working class and especially the middle classes has actually been the watchword of the PT’s ideologues, especially in the state of São Paulo, the most industrialized region of the country. While it was the birthplace of the PT and the industrial unions, the PT has been unable to challenge 30 years of regional-chauvinist governments of the main right-wing opposition, now organized in the Brazilian Social Democratic Party (PSDB).

This outlook was clearly expressed in the runup to the impeachment vote in April by one of Boulos’ main apologists, University of São Paulo professor, *Folha* columnist and former president Lula spokesman, André Singer: “Whatever happens in Congress regarding the vote, Brazil will be looking in the mirror,” he wrote on April 9, 2016.

As Singer himself could have predicted, the vote turned into a carnival of horrors that included apologies for the torturers of the military dictatorship, a spectacle that would, according to his reasoning, prove that the PT was ousted for being “too good” for Brazil.

For his part, Boulos wrote in his September 11, 2014 column titled “There is Fascism in São Paulo” that “the economic dynamics have settled a [socially] sanitizing mindset in the elites and middle classes” of São Paulo.

Later, in July 2015, in a seminar about the PT’s years in power sponsored by the *Brasileiros* magazine, Boulos declared that the party’s “model of life improvement by consumption shapes consumers’ minds, not minds of people who demand social rights,” and that this favored a “meritocratic, depoliticized” environment.

In other words, formerly impoverished layers of society have turned to the right because the PT has presided over income gains made possible by the now evaporated commodities and emerging markets boom, which allowed for minimal increases in consumption. As a result, Boulos argues, the workers have been bought off and are indifferent to questions of social rights.

That he makes this analysis from the vantage point of São Paulo, the epicenter of Brazilian capitalism, a city of 11 million with 15 percent of the population living in slums and the most extreme levels of social inequality on the planet, is all the more striking.

This outlook, which essentially blames the working class for its own oppression, becomes an all-purpose justification for the existing social order and the political foundation for the most shameless forms of opportunism.

One should not then be surprised that among the “new forms of organization” he praises are the state-promoted “popular councils” of Venezuela, through which the country’s bourgeois government seeks to legitimize the political disarming of the working class and impose the policies that have brought about the current economic disaster. As he put it at a June, 2015 pseudo-left meeting featuring ex-president Lula himself, São Paulo’s PT mayor Fernando Haddad and David Harvey: “Some

people have hallucinations that the PT is forming a Bolivarian government. I wish it were!”

The full meaning of these conceptions is made clear in his comment that “it is not possible to organize the people without obtaining something from the government.” Or as he put it as long ago as 2011 in a seminar of the Brazilian section of the Committee for a Workers’ International: “You can have 20 seminars on Marxism with the homeless, but they will not organize if you can’t offer them a rent allowance.”

In the face of such deep-going and arrogant contempt for the working class and the oppressed, of such an abandonment of a class analysis, of such a dependence on the capitalist state, any claim that Guilherme Boulos is a socialist, let alone a Marxist, can only be made in political bad faith.

The resort to this sort of political charlatany is a symptom of the desperation the whole pseudo-left milieu feels when faced with the collapse of its foremost project for more than 30 years, the Workers Party. Over a protracted period, it was forged into the preferred party of rule of the Brazilian bourgeoisie, in many ways anticipating the trends observed in the contemporary politics of the industrialized countries, such as Podemos in Spain, Syriza in Greece and the New Anti-capitalist Party in France.

Virtually every organization today pretending to oppose the PT from the left has not only functioned within the party, but has played an active role in both its inception and its transformation into a party of bourgeois rule. Generally expelled by the PT through the years for considering the party too blunt in its shift to the right, these tendencies never wished to criticize the organization or draw any lessons from its history. Instead, they have pledged to repeat its betrayals over and over again with the formation of fronts and “broad parties” such as the current PSOL and the “Fearless People’s Front.” The unanimous turn to Boulos reflects their understanding that the whole project might not survive their tactical differences.

Guilherme Boulos’ ubiquitous presence today in self-styled “left” circles in Brazil stems from a class position, that of a privileged layer of academics, think tank and state functionaries who are deeply influenced by French subjective idealist thought and its postmodernist representatives in particular, especially those drawn from his alma mater, the University of São Paulo.

But this thought is also reminiscent of that of their contemporary American counterparts, influenced by figures such as Herbert Marcuse who long ago dismissed the American working class as a counterrevolutionary force because of the relatively high living standard it won through mass struggles conducted by previous generations.

Boulos’ comments on the “fascism of the middle classes” and the “alienation” of workers are reminiscent of the self-satisfied liberals in the United States who blame the “white working class”—often referred to as the “middle class”—for the rise of Donald Trump.

It is not without irony that a whole layer of contemporary Brazilian intellectuals, historically hostile to the influence of American thought, have adopted the portion of it that is most useful for denying and concealing the revolutionary strivings of the working class.

The Brazilian working class can break the grip of the PT, the union bureaucracy and their pseudo-left collaborators only through a relentless criticism of these tendencies. It is this struggle that will prepare the independent political mobilization of the working class and the building of a new revolutionary socialist and internationalist leadership.



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