

Brazil's impeachment crisis provokes split in Morenoite PSTU

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On July 6 a major split was announced in the Brazilian United Socialist Workers Party (Partido Socialista dos Trabalhadores Unificado—PSTU), the chief section of the International Workers League (known by the Spanish initials LIT), the international grouping founded by the late Argentine revisionist Nahuel Moreno. Fully half of the party's membership, 739 activists and supporters, including long time central committee members, elected officials and union functionaries, published a manifesto announcing their break with the party.

The split was promptly acknowledged by the PSTU leadership in a “friendly” comment. Party chairman Ze Maria issued a statement in which he began by declaring, “I respect all the comrades that have broken with us,” while declaring their leaving the party “an important mistake.” For their part, those who split declared their belief that the PSTU was no “less revolutionary now than it was before” and described their break with the party as an “exemplary separation, very different from the explosive and destructive splits seen so often in the past.” In short, the split is of a politically unclarified, unprincipled and opportunist character.

The process was announced against the backdrop of the deep crisis and broad realignments in the pseudo-left due to the debacle of the Workers Party (PT) government of President Dilma Rousseff.

The reason given for the split centered on a single national tactic adopted by the PSTU leadership in the course of the right-wing drive to impeach Rousseff. The group advanced the slogan “throw them all out,” essentially providing a left cover for the right-wing, upper middle class-based campaign for the ouster of Rousseff, while failing to provide any warning of the immense dangers confronting Brazilian workers. Having supported imperialist regime-change operations from Syria to Ukraine, the party became complicit in a domestic version of the same process.

For almost a year, the PSTU has dismissed the concerns felt by broad sections of the Brazilian people over both the extra-constitutional methods employed to remove Rousseff on trumped-up charges of budget manipulation, and the sharp right-wing turn taken by the interim government of her former vice president, Michel Temer. According to the party's leadership, the fact that the process is being carried out by the PT's right-wing former allies only proves that the whole thing is just a case of “everything changes, everything stays the same”. As they see it, if anything, the impeachment of Rousseff will accelerate the downfall of the entire bourgeois set-up, bringing the “left” closer to power.

The splinter group has announced it will form a new party, MAIS (Portuguese initials for Movement for an Independent Socialist Alternative). What has driven the split with the PSTU and the launching of this new formation are clearly powerful class pressures, unleashed by the profound economic and political crisis gripping Brazilian capitalism.

The specific pressure pushing those forming the MAIS comes from within the broad middle class pseudo-left milieu, where the PSTU's “throw them all out” slogan evoked intense hostility. Those who politically orbit the corrupt bourgeois political apparatus of the PT, including elements entrenched within the union bureaucracy and academia

within Brazil's south and south-east, fear that the PT's debacle could precipitate not only the ouster of Rousseff, but also the further breakdown of the political network within which they operate, including the unions and the nationalist “social movements”, such as the prominent “Landless Workers Movement” or its urban counterpart, the “Homeless Workers Movement,” led by the anti-Marxist Guilherme Boulos.

This motivation is clearly expressed within by the new group's first public announcement. It makes clear that freeing itself from the PSTU leadership would allow it to immediately and wholeheartedly join the “Temer Out” demonstrations, set up by the pseudo-left and other PT allies. These protests only served to supplement the actions of the PT's leadership, which refused to make any real appeal to the broad masses, let alone the working class, against the impeachment process. Instead, it focused on back-room negotiations to block the impeachment in the Senate, while promising to accelerate the implementation of a right-wing agenda if it returns to power.

Not surprisingly, the organization's first public document, the July 6 manifesto entitled “É preciso arrancar alegria ao futuro” (taken from a Mayakovsky poem), and the speeches at its launching meeting on July 23, included no attempt whatsoever to draw up a balance sheet of the PSTU's political trajectory or past policies. There was absolutely no mention of the pro-imperialist positions taken by the PSTU and its international allies in the LIT in support of the fascist-spearheaded coup in Ukraine or the imperialist regime change interventions in Libya and Syria, which the new group presumably continues to support.

In the final speech at the July 23 rally, Valerio Arcary, a university professor who was a founder and former president of the PSTU, stated that “six volumes” of documents were produced before the split. Yet none of this apparently is seen as having any significance in terms of clarifying the Brazilian working class as to the challenges and dangers it faces. Instead, the public is merely told that there has been a “friendly break-up”, the MAIS considers PSTU a revolutionary party and, indeed, it intends on running candidates on the PSTU's electoral slates because it doesn't have its own legal status as yet.

What then does the new party stand for? This can be summed up in the historically discredited slogan “unity of the left.” This unity is to be sought on the basis of the lowest common political denominator and entirely national, tactical and electoral considerations. It must include the PT-controlled union bureaucracy, anti-Marxist academics, and the Stalinists of the Brazilian Communist Party.

This political line in no way represents any radical break with the politics of the PSTU, or for that matter with the broader political tendency of which it is part, Morenoism. Moreno was among those who broke with the International Committee of the Fourth International in 1963, rejecting its struggle for the international unity and political independence of the working class based on a revolutionary socialist program, in order to adapt to Castroism, Stalinism and bourgeois nationalism, in particular the Peronist movement in Argentina.

The Brazilian Morenoite group that would later emerge as the PSTU was among the various revisionist elements that had broken with the ICFI, and which had played the key role in founding and building the Workers Party (PT). In the late 1970s, with the two-decade-long US-backed military dictatorship confronting a rising tide of struggles by a militant working class, these forces joined with the union bureaucracy, factions of the Catholic church and Brazilian academics in launching the PT, which was presented as a new Brazilian parliamentary road to socialism and a substitute for the building of a revolutionary Marxist party in the working class.

The Morenoite tendency liquidated itself for a dozen years into this party, which, its name notwithstanding, was and is a bourgeois party, dominated not by workers, but rather by privileged sections of the Brazilian upper middle class. The Morenoite supporters were subsequently expelled as the PT moved ever further to the right under the leadership of former metalworkers union leader Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, becoming the preferred political instrument of Brazil's capitalist ruling class.

Emerging as an independent party in 1993, the PSTU continued the same essential political role of attempting to subordinate the working class to bourgeois politics. Over the whole past period, this has involved the continuous attempt to cobble together an electoral "Left Front," by joining with the Stalinists of the Brazilian Communist Party (PCB) and the bourgeois PSOL (Socialism and Liberty Party), founded by elected officials expelled by the PT, based on a common "left" capitalist program.

Thus, in its quest for the "unity of the left," the MAIS has not strayed far from the party from which it has split. Both the PSOL and the PCB sent speakers to its founding events, along with a number of other pseudo-left outfits.

Nonetheless, the discussions that have accompanied the launching of the new group signal a further shift to the right. One of the few subjects that the MAIS has subjected to analysis is that of the mass demonstrations that shook Brazil in June 2013. These protests saw mainly youth and elements of the middle class take to the streets over a wide range of demands related to the neglect of essential social infrastructure, social inequality and the corruption and self-dealing of the ruling PT government.

At the time, the protests saw members of the PSTU and other pseudo-left groups expelled and even assaulted by far-right elements within the crowds. The working class was still notably absent from these demonstrations. It was not until later that year and into 2014 that mounting social unrest developed into the biggest strike wave in Brazil in two decades.

MAIS's demoralizing conclusion from this experience is that the attacks suffered by the PSTU and others were the result of the left's "arrogance," rather than the conscious intervention of the extreme right and the political hostility of wider layers who, with justification, associated the pseudo-left groups with the ruling Workers Party.

The events showed, according to this analysis, that the left must abandon its "arrogance" and that the masses are unwilling to "obey leaders." The essential meaning is clear. The struggle for socialist consciousness and for the building of a revolutionary Marxist party within the working class must be opposed at all costs.

Moreover, the MAIS has made it clear that this shift to the right is to be prosecuted through a campaign to make the kind of identity politics that have been relentlessly promoted within Brazil's universities in the recent period, the foundation of national political life.

The event at which the new organization was launched was dominated by a celebration of every variety of identity-oriented middle-class movement, from black nationalism and feminism to LGBT liberation, all of which are directed not at any genuine social reform, but rather at the "empowerment of women" and the development of "minority leadership", policies aimed at changing the division of the spoils within

the top 10 percent.

In the final analysis, the launching of the MAIS—and the largely positive response it has received, including from even the PSTU from which it has split—is part of a campaign that is being mounted to prevent any serious political lessons from being drawn from the debacle of the PT and the consequences of the pseudo-left's historical support for this bourgeois party. This is a necessary political preparation for the creation of a new "left" trap for the working class, along the lines of Syriza in Greece.

The PSTU itself is also indicted by the whole process. The middle class, anti-Marxist character of this organization is clearly expressed by the fact that such opportunist politics developed within its leading cadre and met no resistance. Instead, the party continues to insist that there were no grounds for the split, welcoming the splitters to run as its electoral candidates.

The same must be said of the pseudo-left fraternity that greeted the new party as a revolutionary force, including the Brazilian Morenoite offshoot Revolutionary Workers Movement (MRT, Movimento Revolucionário dos Trabalhadores), affiliated with the Argentinean Socialist Workers Party (PTS, Partido de los Trabajadores Socialistas) and publisher of the Esquerda Diário web site.

These organizations are united by a common political method, which is determined by strictly national and factional concerns, and by a common social orientation, which is toward privileged layers of the middle class. All of them are hostile to genuine revolutionary Marxism, embodied in the international strategic experiences of the struggle of Trotskyism for the political independence and international unity of the working class.

In the end, their class interests explain their refusal to account in any way for their political trajectory over more than a half century since their break with Trotskyism and the International Committee of the Fourth International, or to make any class analysis of the PT and its history, as the MAIS project once more shows.

The split within the PSTU and the broader movement for "regroupment" within the Brazilian pseudo-left are symptomatic of the profound crisis gripping this entire socio-political layer, as the breakdown of Brazilian capitalism renders it increasingly unable to continue suppressing the class struggle.

The most urgent task posed by this crisis is the construction of a new revolutionary leadership in the working class, based on a relentless struggle against these political tendencies and the assimilation of the long struggle of Trotskyism against revisionism. This means building a Brazilian section of the International Committee of the Fourth International.



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