

After the impeachment: Brazil's pseudo lefts shift further rightward

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The August 31 ouster of Workers Party president Dilma Rousseff, following her conviction by Brazil's Senate on trumped-up impeachment charges of fiscal misconduct, has had wide repercussion across the political spectrum in Latin America and internationally.

The almost 10 months of the impeachment process saw international interventions such as a letter of condemnation by Labour and Scottish National Party MPs published in the *Guardian* on May 26, a letter by 40 Democratic US congressmen casting doubt on the process in late July, a condemnatory statement by Democratic presidential candidate Bernie Sanders in early August and, finally, the recalling of the Venezuelan, Bolivian and Ecuadorian ambassadors following Rousseff's sentencing on August 31.

Faced with Brazil's deepest economic crisis in a century, set into motion by the end of the commodities boom, national and international finance capital have moved to impose the country's most right-wing government since the return of civilian rule in 1985.

The reactions of Sanders, the Labour MPs, et al. is not in opposition to this declaration of class war. Rather, their criticisms of the impeachment were offered as a form of friendly counsel to the Brazilian bourgeoisie, a reminder of the PT's long record of service to world capitalism.

These bourgeois forces saw in the PT's ouster, after 13 years of rule, the debacle of one of their main inspirations worldwide. For almost four decades the party had worked to hold in check the actions of Brazil's large and concentrated working class, offering one of the world's most successful models for suppressing the class struggle.

In the context of the deepening international capitalist crisis, the cry of foul play by Sanders and co. is above all an attempt to salvage the PT's legacy and exempt the party from any responsibility for its own ouster and for the unprecedented attacks that are now being prepared against the living standards of the Brazilian masses.

Historically, the party's emergence was hailed by the Brazilian and international bourgeoisie as an early welcome turn in post-Soviet politics. In contemporary terms, it served as a prototype of the "parties of the 99%" promoted by today's pseudo lefts—that is, parties like Syriza in Greece or Podemos in Spain—which attempt to corral the working class behind the interests of the top 10 percent of society, a social layer which internationally includes the

union bureaucracy and other privileged layers of the upper middle class.

From its inception in the late 1970s, the PT project was meant to isolate the working class from Marxism and any trace of revolutionary consciousness, substituting for it nationalism and even the "liberation theology" of sections of the Catholic Church. Insofar as it spoke about the working class, it was from the standpoint of the lowest level trade unionism, for which the pragmatic union boss Lula was chosen as public face and spokesman.

The PT allowed Brazil's ex-Trotskyists and Stalinists to join together, avoiding any reference to the Soviet Union or any of the great political problems confronting the working class in the course of the 20th century. Part of a worldwide turn to the right by such forces, this effort anticipated the later liquidation of the Communist Parties in Europe and of the Soviet Union itself.

For the exiled or underground leadership of Brazil's left movements, the PT's ascension provided a means of avoiding any serious discussion of the tragedy of the Latin American petty-bourgeois nationalist and guerrilla movements they had promoted in the 1960s and 1970s, and the subsequent loss of a whole generation of activists to state terror across the continent.

The PT was then the banner of the unity of the left around a pact of silence over the great political problems faced by the working class, an agreement to refer any question to the "instinctive," "popular" wit of Lula and his clique, whose chief political characteristic was to make a mockery of every question of theory and history. As for what the PT stood for, it was supposedly a "new" peaceful road to socialism, uniquely Brazilian and independent from past and international experience.

Over the course of the almost four decades that followed, many tendencies, the predecessors of the current Brazilian pseudo left, were expelled from or left the PT to operate essentially as external advisers, supporting the party at decisive moments and never questioning the class forces which dominated it from the start. At most they offered mild criticism of the party going too far by accepting millionaires into its ranks, and later, billionaires into its cabinets.

The virtual consensus of all pseudo-left groups around the "Fora Temer" (out with Michel Temer, Rousseff's former vice president who has now replaced her as result of the impeachment) demonstrations shows that they are fully engaged in burying any attempt at a balance sheet of the PT's trajectory.

The new Morenoite party, MAIS, summed up this attitude in a September 1 article by Henrique Canary, called “Second chance,” in which he welcomes the return of the unions to street demonstrations after Rousseff’s fall. In reality, while limited numbers of union officials have joined the protests, the CUT, Brazil’s main PT-affiliated union federation, has failed to mobilize any significant section of the working class.

Canary, moreover, raises no questions as to the political motivations of the union bureaucracy, much less challenges its domination over the working class. Nor does he ask why the union bureaucracy supported a bourgeois government hailed by the world’s bankers for 13 years.

What is involved in this failure to seriously examine the experience with the PT lies an even further shift to the right by these forces, mirroring the recent moves of Sanders in supporting the most unpopular candidate in the history of US elections, Hillary Clinton, or the continued support by the “left” section of Labour for a party which harbors the war criminal Tony Blair. This shift to the right is rooted in the long-running increased financialization in world economy, which has raised the income of sections of the petty-bourgeoisie and the union bureaucracy, providing a new social constituency for the policies of war and social reaction.

This shift to the right is expressed in an open attack on the working class by the Pabloite Insurgência, Brazilian section of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International, which functions within the PSOL (Party of Socialism and Freedom, which was formed by federal legislators who were expelled from the PT). In line with the reactionary ideology of PT-linked intellectuals, leading Insurgência member José Correia Leite wrote recently that “consumerism,” fostered by an increase in wages under PT rule, rendered the working class indifferent to politics.

In parallel with this attempt to blame the working class for the fate of the PT has come an evermore unanimous adoption of the interpretation of Temer’s government as a matter of race. It is increasingly condemned as a “big house,” or plantation administration, by a social layer that has long been insensitive to the needs of Brazil’s workers of every race.

The depth of Brazil’s crisis and the sharp dangers confronting the working class were very consciously and ominously spelled out by one of the country’s leading papers, *Folha de São Paulo*, two days after Rousseff’s ouster. Referring to scattered protests around the country against the new government, an editorial titled “Fascists on the Run,” referring to anarchist elements in the demonstrations, declared:

“Democracies incapable of repressing the fanatics of violence are candidates for repeating the [experience of] Germany’s Weimar Republic of the 1930s, engulfed by street violence until giving way to the worst dictatorship there ever was.”

Significantly, Diana Assunção, leading candidate of the MRT (Revolutionary Workers Movement, the Brazilian Morenoite faction aligned with the Argentine PTS, Socialist Workers Party) in the next São Paulo elections, ignored the open threat of fascism and dictatorship expressed by *Folha de S. Paulo*, treating it again as a mainly racial issue. Answering the editorial on the MRT’s website Esquerda Diário on September 2, Assunção wrote: “the

fascists are the police who kill blacks in the country’s shanty towns, the authoritarians are those who kidnap, steal millions of votes to install their representative, of the Big House.”

The adoption of this analysis is a damning exposure of these political layers, who have no interest in and are incapable of warning the working class as to the dangers that it faces. Instead, they seek to conceal these dangers through the promotion of reactionary identity-based policies that have in recent years justified imperialist interventions in the name of racial minorities and women’s rights, and have been turned into a primary instrument for diverting class tensions and justifying law-and-order campaigns.

The pseudo-left blindness to the depth of the crisis and threat of dictatorship, combined with a dismissal of class analysis, finds its most finished form in the Morenoite PSTU’s light minded dismissal of the concerns of wide layers of Brazilians with Rousseff’s ouster. Most recently, in a September 7 editorial, the party declared that “the impeachment did not signify a defeat of the working class, much less a ‘coup’. On the contrary, it produced an even more fragile government and opened the way to the widening of the struggles of the working class.”

This pretense of optimism, which could be summed up in the slogan “first Temer, then us,” is belied by the fate of the party itself, which lost half its members to a split that was carried out on the sole publicly declared basis of the PSTU’s tactical response to the impeachment, which was essentially an adaptation to the campaign of the political right against Rousseff under the slogan “fora todos,” or “throw them all out.”

Those who left and formed the MAIS have voiced no disagreement with the PSTU’s Morenoite revisionist foundations or its pro-imperialist policies in supporting CIA regime-change operations from Syria to Ukraine.

Instead, their sole concern was to disassociate themselves with the PSTU’s line on impeachment and thereby eliminate an impediment to their pursuit of “unity of the left” with all manner of Stalinists, Maoists and members of the bourgeois PSOL.

All of these tendencies are moving, in tandem with the Brazilian bourgeoisie, sharply to the right, as the profound crisis of Brazilian and world capitalism is preparing a turn to the left by the Brazilian working class and an explosion in the class struggle.



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