

“Brazilian Trump” or “Brazilian Duterte”? Media works to normalize the far-right for 2018 elections

Miguel Andrade
17 November 2017

Since the beginning of November, Brazil’s corporate media has mounted a drive to normalize the presidential bid of the fascist reserve army captain Jair Bolsonaro, a seven-term federal congressman from the state of Rio de Janeiro. This campaign has developed in face of a mounting crisis confronting the candidacy of his closest extreme-right challenger, São Paulo Mayor João Doria. The billionaire Doria, responsible for the 2016 mayoral election’s greatest upset, the taking of São Paulo’s city hall from Workers Party (PT) mayor Fernando Haddad, had been described in a Eurasia Group report from August as the “ideal candidate.”

Bolsonaro has been trailing former Workers Party (PT) President Lula da Silva consistently in every poll for the 2018 presidential elections, running a distant second. The last Ibope election poll, from October 30, gave him 13 percent, behind Lula’s 35 percent, with Doria trailing in sixth place.

Under these conditions, Bolsonaro has been increasingly presented by the corporate media as “the businessmen’s choice”—a status claimed by Lula himself many times over the last 15 years—with great weight being given to his “transition team,” especially economist Adolfo Sachsida, from the country’s Federal Applied Economic Research Institute (IPEA), the leading technical body of the Economy Ministry.

Two of the country’s leading newspapers, *Folha de São Paulo* and *Valor Econômico*, have in the last two weeks run editorials and leading articles on the “openness” of the far-right representative to “economic liberalism.” This would signal a shift to the center in relation to his previous “positions associated with the [1964-1985, US-backed] dictatorship,” which was supposedly hostile to the free market. A report in *Valor Econômico* on November 7, “Bolsonaro’s team takes shape,” was typical in questioning the “half-heartedness” of Bolsonaro’s liberalism while promoting Sachsida as its standard-bearer.

In such redemptive reports, the rule has been to drop every previous mention of his record of racism, misogyny, defense of torture and executions and promises to kill drug traffickers and users, in countless reactionary rants over decades.

In an even more approving tone, *Folha de S. Paulo* chose as a Sunday headline on November 12, “Market already sees Bolsonaro as an option against Lula.” The report quotes several hedge-fund executives as saying that Bolsonaro’s recent support for privatizations have made him more appealing than Lula, only

in passing recalling Bolsonaro’s political past as “controversial.”

The episode chosen to illustrate his “controversial” past is a 1998 interview with a late-night comic in which he called for the execution of then-sitting president Fernando Henrique Cardoso (FHC). Head of a right-wing government completely subordinated to the IMF, Cardoso is a known atheist and former exile as part of the bourgeois opposition to the 1964-1985 dictatorship. Later, in 2016, Bolsonaro would dedicate his vote in favor of Workers Party president Dilma Rousseff’s ouster to General Brilhante Ustra, Rousseff’s torturer in the 1970’s, when she was imprisoned for joining a nationalist urban guerrilla group.

The willingness of the bourgeoisie to cast its lot with a fascistic candidate has been clear for over a year. Previously, however, it had signaled its support for the eugenicist João Doria, Jr., best known for his attempts to serve the São Paulo’s homeless population a waste-based flour ration, while telling health experts that it wouldn’t be degrading to the poor because they have “no feeding habits, just hunger.”

After campaigning on a platform of “internal deportations” of the unemployed and homeless to the Brazilian hinterlands, Doria’s nearly one year in office has been characterized by a “war on crack” launched in the service of building interests in São Paulo’s rapidly gentrifying downtown. The result has been the victimization of some of the most oppressed layers of the Brazilian working class, including sexual minorities and squatters fleeing police-backed fascist vigilantes in the city’s shantytowns.

As part of Doria’s “war,” working class families of the Campos Elíseos neighborhood, known for its so-called “crackland,” awoke on May 21 to an operation to demolish tenement buildings with people still inside them. After public outrage over the wounding of a family during a demolition, the operation was suspended. In the same vicinity, a brutal invasion by São Paulo’s notoriously murderous Military Police of the city’s only downtown slum, the so-called “Favela do Moinho,” ended with the kidnapping, torture and murder of a young worker, Leandro Santos, by the shock troops of the elite ROTA squad.

Branded “the Brazilian Trump” for hosting and owning rights to the Brazilian edition of “The Apprentice,” Doria assembled from day one a cabinet of millionaires and friends determined to effect a massive transfer of wealth to the rich in one of the most unequal regions in the world. A stated goal is the privatization of 5 billion

reais (US\$1.6 billion) worth of city assets, including the ticketing system for São Paulo's 80km metro and 10,000 bus lines together with all of mass transit users' data. Hundreds of millions are to be pardoned from fines imposed on building companies for resisting public utility decrees and handed out to "settle" cases with construction giants through land swaps.

But how was the billionaire Doria, mockingly referred to as a promoter of the "Cashmere republic," able to defeat Haddad in every district in the city, including Workers Party strongholds in the city's so called "red belt" of industrial and working class areas, in the first elections after Rousseff's impeachment?

True to Lula's promise five months earlier in front of a São Paulo crowd of 100,000 that the PT was not willing to "set fire to the country" over the impeachment, Haddad's right-wing reelection campaign was entirely focused on proving his pro-business credentials, clearing the way for Doria and the strengthening of the far-right.

Haddad had been Lula's handpicked choice for the 2012 mayoral elections, having served as the PT's Education Minister from 2005 to 2012, under both Lula and Rousseff. He was credited as the architect of the ProUni and Fies programs to subsidize and offer loans for private university applications. According to a *Revista da Fapesp* report in 2013, this allowed for an expansion of 4 million private university positions over the period, while public universities created just one million more positions. The overwhelming majority of those positions were, moreover, in for-profit education empires with shares negotiated on the stock market, such as the Kroton group.

His credentials would be later propped up by his attempt to create an anti-homophobia program for elementary and middle schools, which was killed by Rousseff under pressure from her right-wing coalition, including Bolsonaro. The fraudulent "education expansion" and, later, his targeting by Christian chauvinists, constituted the principal basis for the pseudo-left's support for Haddad, despite his historic position on the right wing of the PT.

The right-wing character of his city administration was characterized by his repressive response to the June 2013 protests, the largest in the country since the end of military rule.

As frightened unions initially stayed away from demonstrations, the corporate press started hailing their "anti-corruption" theme, which was constantly reaffirmed by a petty-bourgeois leadership that rejected "organization" and "parties." The unions' paralysis was accompanied by that of the pseudo-left, which didn't want to legitimize widespread opposition to the PT-linked apparatus. Far-right elements intervened later in the demonstrations, physically assaulting anyone they associated with the PT, the unions and the pseudo-left.

From then on, the pressing issues of the rising cost of living, the capitalist crisis and housing scarcity first animating demonstrators were buried under three years of moralistic debate over cycling lanes, "green" consumer choices, the "ethics" of riding mass transit and the "right to the city"—debates designed to silence criticism of capitalism by drawing a distinction between "speculators" and "productive" capitalists fighting for control over the economy, and by promoting "localism."

Later, when Haddad finished in second place in last year's vote, with a bare 16 percent of the vote, the recriminations within the pseudo-left turned to blaming the working class for its "indifference" to the moralistic petty-bourgeois environmentalist campaigns. These elements reached the point of slandering the workers as "integrated into neoliberalism" and even aligned with fascism.

Typical articles directed at those not voting for Haddad ran in PT's mouthpiece *Carta Capital*: "The middle classes are made fools by the elite" (June 27), and "Like Doria, the people of São Paulo ignore the poor."

Such articles were in time perfectly complemented by demoralized pieces in the pseudo-left organs: "What is to be done? Notes on the general dismay at the latest events" (*Esquerda Online*), "Notes on Judith Butler and those [progressives] who want to leave Brazil" (*Outras Palavras*) and "Only the homeless may save us" (by novelist Xico Sá in *El País*).

Haddad is now considered a potential replacement PT presidential candidate as Lula fights corruption charges that may lead to barring him from running. His "memoir" of the mayoral period, published by the *piauí* magazine in June under the title "I have felt in my skin what I had read in books. An encounter with Brazilian patrimonialism" is a right-wing profession of faith, criticizing the deal to freeze transit fares back in 2013 and ending with a paean to PT rule, declaring: "We will know in 2018 if the workers will be able to nourish and value the tenuous breeze of equality and tolerance felt for the first time."

This is a serious warning to the working class. Slander will inevitably be the response to any opposition from the left to Lula until the elections. The PT's orientation will shift further rightward to the old reactionaries and nationalist sections of the state and military. The building of a new revolutionary leadership, based upon a break from the PT, its union apparatus and the orbiting pseudo-left groups, is the urgent task facing advanced workers.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact