

# François Hollande rallies to the cause of Brazil's Lula

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On May 15, the Spanish news agency EFE reported that the former president of the French Senate, Jean-Pierre Bel, has organized a “European Leaders Call in Support of Lula” manifesto asking for Lula to be allowed to run in the October general elections.

Among the signatories of this document is former French President François Hollande, a proven enemy of the international working class and the oppressed nations, organizer of the French return to the “scramble for Africa” and the destruction of democratic rights in France with the permanent incorporation of emergency powers in the French constitution.

Also signing the appeal was former Prime Minister Jose Luis Zapatero, who carried out savage attacks on the Spanish working class in the wake of the 2008 world financial crisis.

The support for Lula by such figures is another exposure of the Workers Party (PT) narrative that former President Dilma Rousseff’s impeachment on trumped up charges of budget manipulation and now Lula’s arrest are part of an imperialist attack on representatives of the Brazilian working class.

The news of the manifesto has been widely circulated by PT’s supporters in academia and among state-funded “independent” blogs and media, all of whom have also rejoiced over the sympathetic coverage of the Workers Party’s downfall by such mouthpieces of bourgeois reaction as the *New York Times* and the *Guardian*. The hope among these layers is that imperialist pressure will convince the Brazilian bourgeoisie to place the PT once again in power.

The opinion pages and editorials of these major Western newspapers have expressed sympathy for Lula’s fate, portraying him as a fallen hero and even the target of a frame-up, leaving ample room to justify his evermore unlikely return to G20 and Davos meetings as Brazil’s head-of-state.

One could cite *Le Monde*’s May 17 front page, featuring an article written from prison by Lula himself, or *Radio France Internationale*’s and *Le Monde*’s May 13 criticisms of the Brazilian press for not highlighting a photo of Lula surrounded by supporters moments before handing himself in to be arrested, which ran on every major paper of the “democratic imperialist” alliance.

More revealing was the *New York Times*’ April 12 editorial calling Lula a “dynamic and charismatic leader”, whose fall was “painful and disheartening,” while abstaining completely from any comment on Lula’s actual corruption charges. Calling for “a

leader who can ensure that gains against corruption are not setbacks for democracy,” the newspaper of record of the US political establishment essentially counseled the right-wing coalition that succeeded Workers Party rule and the bloodthirsty prosecutors obsessed with Lula’s role as “the corruptor of Brazilian society” to recognize his political usefulness.

The most remarkable of such editorials however could be found in London’s *Financial Times* as early as January 25, when Lula’s appeal was struck down by the regional court that finally ordered his arrest. “Lula’s conviction will not make Brazil great again,” was the headline of the *FT* editorial, which warned that “the many opponents of Lula are mistaken in their joy. Brazil, one of the most unequal countries in the world, needs a strong, center-left party like the PT.”

Given that drone murders, destructions of entire Middle Eastern societies, emergency powers and prosecution of whistleblowers—the recent disgusting operations against Julian Assange come immediately to mind—are all applauded endlessly by these papers, one is obliged to ask: what is behind such a praise and grief for the supposedly “anti-imperialist”, “nationalist” and “socialist” Brazilian Workers Party and its leader?

To ask the question is to answer it: Lula and the Workers party have never been anything of the sort, and the *New York Times* & Co. are treating Lula as the precious political asset that he has been for world imperialism over the course of 40 years.

The evidence presented so far against Lula, resulting in one conviction out of the seven cases still pending against him, is exceedingly thin. While the charges that have put him in jail may be trumped up, this is not because he’s innocent. Rather it is because the entire Carwash (Lava-Jato) corruption probe has served as an instrument for the Brazilian bourgeoisie to push the country’s entire political system to the right.

The prosecutors are not indicting Lula for overseeing over the course of two presidential terms a political and economic system steeped in corruption, and, with the aid of the union bureaucracy, moving against workers’ strikes and attacking social rights. Rather, they have confined themselves to a moralistic exposure of petty political horse-trading.

The complete contempt for democratic rights and the move towards dictatorship exposed by the prosecutorial methods of the Carwash investigation express the desperation of a national bourgeoisie that finds itself in an historical blind alley.

A grim economic perspective—a three-year-long, 10 percent

contraction of GDP and the collapse of Brazilian capitalism's orientation to the formerly booming commodity markets and Chinese investments—has undermined the core of the PT's strategy of using the state to favor "national champion" industrial and commodity monopolies—from the state-run oil giant Petrobras to privatized mining conglomerates as well as private soybean, cattle, chemical and building industry empires. This turn in economic fortune, the result of the global crisis of capitalism, has demoralized the PT and its allies in the trade unions, which have functioned to suppress the class struggle in one of the most unequal societies on the planet.

It is not only the PT; no political wing of the Brazilian bourgeoisie enjoys any legitimacy. No less than half of the sitting congressmen face corruption investigations, and—according to a *Folha de São Paulo* report from April 22—15 presidential hopefuls face no less than 160 investigations between them. Meanwhile, the electoral year has brought Congress to a complete paralysis, with "essential" projects such as the arch-reactionary pension "reform" indefinitely delayed out of fear that congressmen who vote in favor will be thrown out by the voters.

Far from restoring stability and profits, the ouster of the Workers Party and the jailing of Lula have been viewed by imperialism as a reckless move. Diplomatic snubs during the 2017 Latin American tours of US Vice President Mike Pence and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu—an idol of Brazil's evangelical Christian right caucus which comprises a third of Congress—stand in sharp contrast to Lula's endless state visits abroad and George W. Bush's comprehensive 2007 visit to Brazil.

Against this backdrop, PT mouthpieces such as *CartaCapital* and *Brasil247* and pundits like Luís Nassif, the major union federations—along with a host of their pseudo-left acolytes, which had participated in building the PT beginning in 1980 and later were expelled or split from it on tactical grounds, such as the Morenito and Lambertite coalition in the form of the Socialism and Liberty Party (PSOL) and the Workers' Cause Party (PCO)—have since April come together in a "Free Lula" campaign.

The attempts by this "united left" to present the concerns for Lula expressed by the media in the major imperialist centers as a vindication of their thesis that the PT suffered a feudal reaction and a "coup" in 2016, and that Lula is a class war prisoner, are politically criminal. They only serve to strengthen far-right figures claiming to oppose the PT's schemes.

So-called "public intellectuals" who have spent years criticising Lula's "neoliberal" policies are now making the case that the PT "underestimated" its "enemies" in the ruling class, and that its policies were too radical. A clear, but by no means exhaustive example may be found in the writings of PT economist and University of São Paulo professor Leda Paulani, who wrote in 2003 a now-famous essay called "Brazil Delivery."

After dealing with some economic statistics, she warned: "needless to say that such an economic situation will lead to an inevitable political crisis. It is true, however, that in such a case the Northern Big Brother may come to help. Brazil's current president [Lula], as some imagine, is being promoted, with symptomatic American support, to the position of a 'world leader'", and is "being presented as a sort of showcase of the marvelous new

world order."

In November 2014, interviewed by *RevistaFórum*, Paulani seized on a brief attempt by the government to lower interest rates to say that "Rousseff has changed Lula's policies, challenging the banking lobby", and that "she would stay on this path". Just one month later, Rousseff would appoint Joaquim Levy, one of the "Chicago Boys", to head the Finance Ministry and begin a new round of interest rate hikes. A year later, on November 12, 2015, she declared to *cartamaior.com.br*: "Rousseff's mistake" was to lower interest rates to appease the market, presenting "an interventionist image that businessmen don't like" in order to later, on July 27, 2017, declare to *CartaCapital* that "we have as our first task in Brazil guaranteeing that democracy is not destroyed", apologising for the PT program of administration of Brazilian capitalism as a paradise for banks and speculators.

But the risks to democracy, as far as this milieu is concerned, come not from capitalism or the PT's own policies, but from the prejudices of the workers. The article "Losers and Winners: a balance sheet of the coup", by Luis Felipe Miguel on the *Boitempo* publishing house blog, affirms that the impeachment was only possible because "Christian fundamentalism is ever more necessary to compose the right-wing's social base. The homophobic and anti-feminist discourse is no eccentricity of the Brazilian right. It is an essential component to give popular appeal to their positions. It is not casual that its political presence has grown from the moment that the compensatory policies of Lula eroded the right's electoral domains." In other words, supposed economic progress made workers more vulnerable to prejudice.

This typical irrationalist and misanthropic rant, a product of four decades of postmodernist thought at universities, fuels slanders against workers and the conclusion that, in the end, the PT's pro-capitalist policies and Lula's leadership were the best to which they could aspire.

The historical record before 2003, however, shows even more clearly that Lula and the anti-Trotskyists gathered today in groups like PSOL and PCO, who helped to build the PT, designed it from its inception as a means of diverting the fight for socialism, subordinating workers to the trade unions and corralling them behind the "national bourgeoisie".

One leading apologist of the PT, Armando Boito, put it in clear class terms, in an essay for the FGV think-tank: "In order for the Lula and Rousseff governments to overcome the stagnation that dominated the 1990s," it turned out to be important to have "an intervention from the popular movement in our political history. It was a party created by the trade unions, the PT, that reshaped the proposal for state intervention for the development of Brazilian capitalism."



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