

Less than 100 days before elections, half of Brazilians support no candidate

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With general elections in Brazil less than 100 days away, polls show half of the country's population supporting none of the prospective candidates. Masses of workers and poor have been radicalized by the effects of the world capitalist crisis and the debacle of the commodity-exporting model adopted by the country's ruling class during 13 years of Workers Party (PT) rule, ended by the 2016 impeachment of Dilma Rousseff on trumped-up charges of budget manipulation. At the same time, however, the whole entire political system is moving sharply to the right.

The latest polls, conducted by the Datafolha institute and reported last month, have shown the persistence of a one-year trend of up to 46 percent of voters without a candidate or willing to spoil their ballots in the so-called "spontaneous scenario," where voters are not presented with a prospective list of candidates. This, in a country where voting is compulsory and abstention can result in penalties ranging from fines, to denial of a passport and being excluded from civil service jobs.

Current President, Michel Temer, elected in 2014 as Rousseff's running-mate, is the most despised head of state of any democratic period in Brazilian history, with only a 3 percent approval rating. Temer has ruled out running to keep his post, even though he faces imminent criminal persecution on corruption charges as soon as he steps out of the presidential palace on January 1.

In the Datafolha poll's so-called "induced scenario," where voters are asked to choose from a list of candidates, those still saying that they would cast blank or spoiled ballots oscillated between 21 and 34 percent, depending on whether former PT president Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva was in the running, an increasingly unlikely scenario. When Lula is included in the candidates' list, he leads the polls with 30 percent, followed by 21 percent casting blank or spoiled ballots and 17 percent for the fascist Jair Bolsonaro. Given Lula's exclusion, 34 percent said they would spoil ballots, with a small contingent migrating to Bolsonaro, giving him 19 percent.

Henrique Meirelles, Temer's Economy Minister, who boasts of having left his position as CEO of BankBoston to be Lula's Central Bank chief in order to disassociate himself from Temer's austerity measures, is polling at 1 percent.

Other candidates seeking the blessings of the stock markets, and polling between 7 and 15 percent, are Lula's former environmental minister-turned bankers' darling Marina Silva, former São Paulo governor Geraldo Alckmin from the PT's former right-wing opposition, the Brazilian Social Democracy Party (PSDB), and Ciro Gomes, who is running as the candidate of the Democratic Labor Party (PDT), founded by the former corporatist dictator Getúlio Vargas and later led by João Goulart, the president deposed by the military in 1964.

Lula, who is currently serving a 12-year sentence on charges of money laundering and passive corruption related to the Lava-jato (Carwash) probe into a massive bribes and kickbacks scandal at the country's state-run oil giant Petrobras, is barred from running due to an anti-corruption

law that he himself signed into law in 2010. There is considerable expectation, however, that the country's Supreme Court may at any moment order his release from jail as he appeals the country's (civil) High Court's ruling against him.

There is waning speculation that a favorable Supreme Court ruling before the elections might put pressure on the Electoral Court to grant him a stay on the suspension of his political rights pending his definite conviction by the High Court. This would allow him to run for president and, if elected, secure immunity so long as he stays in office.

The most striking feature of the polls has consistently been the hemorrhaging of support for both the Workers Party and the PSDB, the two parties that have dominated the country's longest, if still brief, democratic period since 1985.

Having supported the impeachment of Rousseff and provided four ministers for Temer's cabinet, the PSDB has been in disarray since its narrow electoral defeat in 2014 by the PT—the fourth in a row. The PSDB's 2014 presidential contender, Aécio Neves, has been ousted from the party leadership after being charged with corruption by the attorney general's office in 2017. His successor, by default, was four-time São Paulo governor Geraldo Alckmin, who hardly commands support of his own party and is unable to poll more than 7 percent, with only 14 percent support in his own state, according to a Ibope poll from April 24.

The PT was the preferred party of rule for the Brazilian bourgeoisie for 13 years. Lula left the presidency in 2010 with an 87 percent approval rating and unanimous praise from capitalist rulers internationally. This was at the height of the commodity boom, in a year that Brazil economy grew 7.6 percent, the fastest rate since 1985.

In contrast, an April 14 poll by Ipsos found that 50 percent of the population thought Lula's then-anticipated arrest was fair, and a much wider margin, 69 percent, thought that he was involved in the schemes investigated by Lava-jato, which are only the tip of the iceberg in terms of the corrupt pro-capitalist policies carried out by the PT government to provide state favors for the most powerful Brazilian industrial, agribusiness and banking monopolies.

The popular rejection of the party is the main factor that has given the upper hand to the anti-PT sections of the Brazilian bourgeoisie, even as dissenting Supreme Court Justices, oligarchic politicians such as former president José Sarney and former Senate president Renan Calheiros, and several state governors have declared that the Supreme Court majority decision denying Lula's appeals and paving the way for his exclusion from the presidential race violates the Brazilian constitution.

Such PT-supporting sections take into account the party's faithful obedience to austerity demands before (in 2003-2006) and after (from 2012 on) the commodity boom that allowed for a limited increase in living standards. They maintain that Lula would lend "legitimacy" to the coming stage of the war on workers being waged in Brazil. Those sections who have deserted Lula and the PT disagree on tactical grounds, fearing a new PT government would be as unstable as the ousted Rousseff

administration.

Such fears are not unfounded, but they apply to every candidate. The poll numbers are a reflection of a leftward movement by the masses and the deep felt anger among workers and the lower middle classes over the support of every candidate for the class war unleashed by the Brazilian bourgeoisie since the international economic crisis first hit Brazil sharply in 2013, leading to an 8 percent drop in the GDP from 2014 to 2016 and virtually zero growth since.

This leftward movement found expression in the massive truckers' strike organized largely out of control of the unions and supported by fully 87 percent of the population, even as they faced food and fuel shortages. This was followed by an oil workers' strike that brought down the president of Petrobras in 24 hours, but was quickly shut down by unions tightly controlled by the PT.

Under these circumstances, the bourgeoisie is promoting the fascist Bolsonaro in order to disorient and divert the growing radicalization of the working class and create a constituency for a far-right mass movement capable of confronting this radicalization by violent means. Bolsonaro is an open supporter of the 1964-1985 dictatorship, who dedicated his vote in favor of Rousseff's impeachment to the military officer who tortured her in the 1970s when she was imprisoned as a member of an urban guerrilla organization.

Bolsonaro defends the death penalty, death squads in Brazil's working-class neighborhoods and the sterilization of poor workers, *O Globo's* Lauro Jardim reported that in February he told a thousand-strong meeting of businessmen hosted by the BTG Pactual bank that to end crime in the Rocinha favela (shantytown), Brazil's largest, he would drop thousands of leaflets giving workers six hours to hand over criminals and then start shooting up the neighborhood. Dozens of reports and videos can be found of his declarations to military, far-right and business audiences spouting fascist filth against the poor, blacks, women, LGBT people and indigenous Brazilians.

Despite growing attempts by the corporate press to normalize Bolsonaro's presidential bid, dropping references to his fascist rhetoric and focusing on the "half-heartedness" of his neoliberal convictions, it is a damning indictment of the policies of the PT and its pseudo-left apologists that after 13 years in power, such a figure is gaining an audience, as the support for military intervention at some blockades during the truckers strike showed.

With the PT and the pseudo left united behind calls for Lula to be freed to confer "legitimacy" on the elections, and the corporate press questioning if Bolsonaro is "trustworthy" from the standpoint of capitalist investors, the far right is able to posture as the only opposition to the scorched earth policies of the ruling class.

The PT and the pseudo lefts are attempting to channel resistance to Bolsonaro behind Lula's or another candidate's electoral bid. The support for right-wing candidates, however, emerged as a protest against the pro-capitalist policies and corruption of the PT itself.

In the city of São Paulo, the PT's incumbent mayor Fernando Haddad lost in the first round to the eugenicist multi-millionaire João Doria (dubbed Brazil's Donald Trump) in the first round with only 17 percent of the votes in 2016. Tellingly, Haddad's strongest support, 24 percent, was in the Pinheiros district, the city's mix of Greenwich Village and Silicon Valley.

Representing these professional layers, the most prominent leader of the Brazilian pseudo left, the anti-Marxist Guilherme Boulos—now a Socialism and Liberty Party (PSOL) presidential candidate and leader of the "free Lula" campaign—reacted at the time by slandering São Paulo's workers as "alienated and consumerist" and the city's middle classes as "fascist."

The evidence that Doria's election was a protest against the PT's right-wing policies is that in barely a year of wholesale privatizations and war

on the poor, Doria's approval rating has been reduced to 15 percent—the same as Haddad's—and his party, the PSDB, is virtually wiped out in terms of national politics.

The dishonest and politically reactionary campaign by the pseudo left to divert popular anger behind a "Free Lula" campaign is summed up in two virtually twin articles by "progressive" writers Eliane Brum—"Lula, the irreconcilable," *El País*, April 11—and Márcia Tiburi—"Lula, the most dangerous of leaders," *Revista Cult*, June 12, 2017. They claim that, while Lula was a "conciliator," the PT was ousted from power for "crossing boundaries" to fight privilege, and was therefore not "tolerated" by the powers-that-be. At one point, Brum claims: "the social programs and affirmative actions of the PT ended up threatening this conciliation." Their argument boils down to Lula being jailed for fighting for the poor.

This is a lie. At the first sign of crisis, in 2013, Rousseff started implementing austerity measures, while banking profits remained at record heights to the end of her government. Lula boasts that his government, at a time of record profits for the capitalists, was the one with least strikes and land occupations.

If Lula maintains some popularity due to his poverty reduction programs, particularly in Brazil's most oppressed region, the northeast, where the PT also has the support of the regional oligarchs and party machines, there has been a decisive break by the working class in the southern, industrial states, mainly São Paulo, Rio Grande do Sul and Rio de Janeiro, due to the PT's neoliberal policies. Once solid PT power bases, Rio Grande do Sul and Rio de Janeiro, are today the most supportive of Bolsonaro.

Rio is the most revealing case. The city was turned into a virtual protectorate of the PT federal government in the run-up to the 2016 Olympics. It became a laboratory for the state's favoring of billionaires and Lula's "war on drugs", which doubled Brazil's prison population.

Tiburi, who is running as the PT candidate for governor in the state of Rio de Janeiro, was able to deliriously claim to *Folha de S. Paulo's* Mônica Bergamo that the "PT has a brave caucus against criminal populism," referring to Bolsonaro—who for years was part of the caucus led by the PT in the federal legislature. The reality, however, is that the kind of police violence and military occupations of the favelas now promoted by Bolsonaro became normalized under the PT itself.

The first tasks of workers in mounting a struggle against the right wing is a complete break from the PT and its pseudo-left apologists, and to set the historical record straight, drawing an unsparing balance sheet of the PT's history.



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