

Brazil election campaign preparing rise of right-wing government

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With Brazil's national elections just two weeks away, it is becoming increasingly clear that, whatever the results at the polls, the next government will be the country's most right-wing since the fall of the 1964–1985 US-backed military dictatorship.

Currently, first-round polls give the the fascistic army reserve captain and seven-term Rio de Janeiro federal representative Jair Bolsonaro the lead with 28 percent, followed by Workers Party (PT) candidate Fernando Haddad with 16 percent and Ciro Gomes of the Democratic Labor Party (PDT) with 13 percent. The candidate for Brazil's former leading right-wing party, the Brazilian Social Democracy (PSDB), has been unable to break out of single digits, despite his electoral alliance holding a third of the seats Congress.

Polls for the second round of the election show Bolsonaro being narrowly defeated by every other candidate.

Whatever the results, however, two trends, vastly accelerated in the recent weeks, must be taken by the working class as a sharp warning of the violent swing by the Brazilian ruling class that lies ahead.

The first is the increasing frequency of comments on the part of military and far-right figures implying that the legitimacy of the next administration may be in question, either because of claims of election fraud or "foreign meddling." The latter is a reference to the strategy of the Workers Party to take the case of former president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, who has been jailed on corruption charges and denied the right to run as the PT's candidate, to the UN.

The second trend is the rush to the right by the so-called "anti-fascist" opposition to Bolsonaro, which is doubling down on its claims, in the fashion of the bankrupt Democratic Party opposition to Trump, that Bolsonaro is a threat to Brazilian capitalist interests.

The far-right campaign to justify a military coup in Brazil, casting the military as the only "legitimate" power, was already evidenced by the April 3 threats made by Brazilian Army commander, Gen. Eduardo Villas Bôas in relation to a Supreme Court ruling on a habeas corpus motion filed on behalf of Lula, which was ultimately struck down. At the time, Villas Bôas declared that "the army shares the feelings of well-meaning citizens' against impunity [for Lula]."

On September 8, Bolsonaro's vice-presidential running mate, Gen. Hamilton Mourão, escalated the campaign, declaring to *Globonews* that the military's "mission" was to "guarantee the proper functioning of the institutions" of the state. He added that, "according to the Army's manuals" it was up to the "interpretation of the commander" whether or not a military intervention was necessary. Making clear the deeply unstable conditions anticipated within military circles, even in the event of a Bolsonaro electoral victory, Mourão said that the president, as commander-in-chief, could "legitimately" mobilize the military for a "self-coup" if he felt "institutions were not working," that is, if the president didn't get his way in the face of political opposition, adding, "as we've seen many times in other countries."

A day later, Gen. Villas Bôas declared to Brazil's right-wing daily *O Estado de S. Paulo* that, in face of both the attempt on Bolsonaro's life by a deeply disturbed individual during a campaign rally, and the brief divisions within ruling circles regarding the blocking of Lula's candidacy after the UN Human Rights Committee's recommendation that he be allowed to run, the legitimacy of the elections could be questioned.

Villas Bôas declared the UN recommendation a "violation of Brazilian sovereignty" after several pundits and an *O Estado de S. Paulo* editorial had already adopted this line, and that on these grounds a ruling in Lula's favor could delegitimize the elections. Likewise, the attack on Bolsonaro could be grounds for Bolsonaro to claim that he was unable to campaign, and also delegitimize the elections. After the knife attack on September 6, Bolsonaro remained in semi-intensive care for two weeks and is still a patient in one of the favorite private hospitals of Brazil's wealthy elite.

Such declarations emboldened Bolsonaro himself to declare, in a video from his hospital room, that the Brazilian electronic ballots were going to be manipulated for a Workers Party victory that would free Lula through a presidential pardon. In the video, he asks his supporters, "think of what you would do in prison; would you accept it? Lula has not attempted to run because he has a plan."

Under the weight of the international economic crisis and the collapse of the commodity boom that allowed the so-called

Pink Tide of IMF-friendly “nationalist” regimes to sweep to power in Latin America, the Brazilian ruling class is demanding not only the destruction of workers’ living standards, but an unhindered alignment with US imperialism and an abandonment of whatever negotiating strategies were employed by the Workers Party to extract benefits from imperialism through ties with China and other “south-south” strategies.

Conscious of the growing restiveness in the working class and the inevitable resistance these policies will produce, ruling circles are increasingly turning to the military. After decades of exclusion from political life due to demoralization after being forced from power and held responsible for the crimes of the murderous 1964–1985 dictatorship, high-ranking generals are taking over civilian posts, including the Defense Ministry, and, most importantly, Rio de Janeiro’s law enforcement. Military officers are also running for office in record numbers.

Most recently, on September 13, for the first time in Brazilian history, a military officer was nominated to serve as counsel to the incoming Supreme Court’s president, José Antônio Dias Toffoli, who claims that four-star Gen. Fernando de Azevedo e Silva is qualified to advise him “with his knowledge of our county.”

Against this backdrop, the “anti-fascist” opposition to Bolsonaro is pitching its appeal to the Brazilian ruling class and “democratic” imperialist governments and officials, allowing the country’s far right to posture as nationalist and an opponent of the establishment.

Leading pundits, both right-wing and ostensibly “left”, including those tied to the Workers Party, have for almost a year attempted to discredit Bolsonaro, not by exposing his lies about being able to create jobs by slashing wages, but by criticizing the “half-heartedness” of his support for neoliberal “reforms,” citing his record of voting against privatizations and the slashing of pensions.

In the last two weeks, however, they have almost unanimously shifted their critique further to the right. They have seized upon several recent reports in the imperialist press, including the *Financial Times*, *Bloomberg* and, most prominently, the *Economist*’s September 20 editorial, claiming Bolsonaro would be a “disastrous president” to try to dissuade Brazil’s ruling class from supporting him.

Celebratory comments from PT-supporting pundits came in the form of an article titled “‘Bye, bye, darling’, says ‘The Economist’ to Bolsonaro” by Flávio Ribeiro on the GGN news website on September 21. Similarly, the sycophantic Paulo Moreira Leite posted a column on the PT-aligned website Brasil247 on September 20, titled “Markets are already starting to distrust Bolsonaro’s unbelievable proposals,” referring to a plan to cut taxes for the rich. In other words, the wisdom of the financial markets’ support for IMF-approved PT policies, and not the votes—much less the mobilization—of the working class, will propel the Workers Party back to power.

The most recent “warnings” against Bolsonaro from the leading imperialist circles have coincided with the rise of the Workers Party’s substitute for Lula, Fernando Haddad, in the latest polls. The only São Paulo mayor to ever lose a re-election bid in the first round with 16 percent of the votes—less than the share of spoiled ballots—Haddad was able to earn São Paulo a Fitch investment grade rating amid the worst economic crisis in a century, an “accomplishment” achieved at the expense of the city’s working class and through a virtual zero investment policy.

Contrary to the “Free Lula” campaign’s lies about the ex-president’s “defiant” policies in favor of the poor, the party has continued a sharp turn to the right to compete with Bolsonaro for the support of the ruling elite. Lula’s nomination of the right-wing Haddad to head his economic team in January was already an indication of this trajectory.

GGN’s editor Luís Nassif celebrated on September 14 an FGV think-tank report explaining that market fluctuations in Brazil were more connected to international factors than any concern by finance capital about a PT victory—also in contradiction to the claims of the “Free Lula” campaign about his “defiant” defense of the oppressed.

This was followed by pundit Patrícia Campos Mello in her September 21 *Folha de S. Paulo* column citing favorable commentary about Haddad, repeatedly pointing out that it came, not from “progressive” and “anti-Trump” newspapers like the *New York Times* or the *Guardian*, but from *Bloomberg* and the *Financial Times* (“Financial markets Bibles are abandoning Bolsonaro”). It is symptomatic of the rightward turn by Bolsonaro’s “anti-fascist” critics that they shy away even from the positive references to the PT in CIA mouthpieces such as the *New York Times*.

One of the reports quoted by these columnists is *Bloomberg*’s Matthew Winkler’s analysis of the Brazilian situation from September 20, which ends by saying that investors believe that the winner of the election “doesn’t matter.”

As the Brazilian military increasingly indicate that it is preparing to guarantee that the election “doesn’t matter,” and the PT makes clear it has no intention of standing in their way, the responsibility for the dangers facing the Brazilian working class lie squarely with those pseudo-left forces promoting the PT as a political alternative.



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