

Who is responsible for the rise of the fascistic Bolsonaro in Brazil?

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With Brazil's second-round election little more than a week away, the fascistic presidential candidate Jair Bolsonaro, who fell just short of winning an outright majority in the first-round vote, has maintained a wide lead over the candidate of the Workers Party (Partido dos Trabalhadores – PT), Fernando Haddad, with the two polling 49 percent and 36 percent respectively.

The advent of a government led by Bolsonaro represents a genuine threat to the Brazilian and Latin American working class. The former army captain has vowed to put an end to all forms of “activism” in Brazil in order to force through the demands of international and Brazilian capital for drastic new attacks on the living standards and basic rights of the working class. In a country that was ruled by a military dictatorship for two decades from the 1960s to the 1980s, this is no empty threat.

The rise of Bolsonaro has laid bare the terminal rot of the political order established in Brazil in the wake of the dictatorship, expressed above all in the betrayals, wholesale corruption and relentless attacks upon the Brazilian working class by the PT over the course of 13 years in government, serving as the preferred instrument of rule of the Brazilian capitalist ruling class. The policies pursued by the PT under the presidencies of Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva and his handpicked successor, Dilma Rousseff, earned the party the hatred and contempt of the masses of workers that it purported to represent, opening the path for a fascist like Bolsonaro – who was an ally of the PT in Congress—to posture as the right-wing populist opposition.

The election was in every sense a referendum on the PT, and its role in placing the full burden of the worst economic crisis in the country's history on the backs of the working class. The results were a crushing rejection of the party, with Bolsonaro winning by a wide margin in the ABC industrial belt where the PT was founded in 1980, as well as in virtually every other working class center. Workers also stayed away from the elections in droves, with a third of the electorate—roughly the same number that voted for Bolsonaro—choosing to vote for no one.

Under these conditions, the entire coterie of pseudo-left organizations that orbit the PT have united under the guise of

fighting the threat of fascism in attempting once again to corral workers behind this deeply discredited capitalist party by calling for a vote for Haddad.

All of them are singing the same refrain: while they call for a vote for Haddad, they offer him and his party no political support.

Thus, the PSTU, the largest Morenoite organization in Brazil, declares that “without giving any confidence or political support to the PT, we must vote for Haddad.”

The MRT, the Brazilian affiliate of the main Argentine Morenoite group, the PTS, states that it will “vote critically for Haddad, without giving any political support to the PT.”

This is all patent nonsense. To vote for a candidate and a party and to agitate for others to do likewise is to provide political support.

Moreover, if the election of Haddad is the only means of countering the danger of fascism in Brazil, then the defense of his government—should he be elected—against those on the right and within the military seeking to overthrow it will become equally necessary.

This, of course, was the path tread by the predecessors of these same pseudo-socialist and ex-Trotskyist organizations in the 1960s and 1970s in relation to the governments of Goulart in Brazil, Peron in Argentina and Allende—who invited Pinochet into his cabinet—in Chile. All of them suppressed workers' struggles and paved the way to the bloody military dictatorships that killed, tortured and imprisoned hundreds of thousands in these countries. These so-called left groups are incapable of learning any lessons from this tragic history.

Among the most preposterous alibis for supporting Haddad and the PT comes from Jorge Altamira, the leader of the PO (Partido Obrero—Workers Party) in Argentina, who acknowledges that the PT has served as the “preferred instrument of the bourgeoisie” since 2002 and describes the party as a “decomposing camarilla,” but nonetheless calls for a vote for its candidate on the grounds that it will serve as a “bridge to the masses who are looking, despite the PT, for a road of combat against fascism.”

What masses is Altamira talking about? The workers have deserted the PT; he is not building any bridge to them, but rather spreading more political disorientation. Support for the

PT is not a road of struggle, but rather one of subordination to a capitalist party.

To justify his position, he says that the PO is urging a vote for Haddad based not on the politics of the PT, but rather the policies “outlined by the ‘feminist movement,’” as manifested in the #elenao (#not him) demonstrations organized on the eve of the election.

These demonstrations attracted hundreds of thousands in spite, not because, of their petty-bourgeois feminist leadership, which sought to unite all women—including female candidates of right-wing bourgeois parties—against Bolsonaro. This is the real orientation of Altamira’s party and all those like it. They oppose the development of a left-wing movement of the working class against capitalism and seek to bolster right-wing movements of the middle class based upon one or another form of identity politics.

This orientation, in the PO’s case, goes hand-in-hand with its alliance with right-wing nationalist parties in Russia.

The naked opportunism of Altamira’s position has apparently provoked some dissension within the PO. The historian and longtime PO supporter Daniel Gaido posted on Facebook an account of an exchange with the party’s leader in which Gaido stated that it is the PT that “is responsible for this rise of the right [and] which paralyzes the masses.” He noted that, on the basis of following the lead of the feminists, one should have demanded a vote for Hillary Clinton against Donald Trump—and, it should be added, is preparing to line up behind the Peronist Cristina Fernández de Kirchner in Argentina.

Nonetheless, seeking to find a means of supporting the PO’s line, Gaido declared that he would “have to check it against the writings of Trotsky.” The good professor can stick his nose in as many books as he likes, but nowhere will he find a justification from Trotsky for telling the masses to vote for a right-wing capitalist candidate as a means of defeating fascism.

With all of these organizations, the headlong rush to support Haddad is a case, as Marx put it, of justifying today’s swinishness with yesterday’s swinishness.

In 1980, Altamira, then in exile, joined with the followers of the French OCI of Pierre Lambert, the Argentine tendency led by Nahuel Moreno and the Pabloite United Secretariat of Ernest Mandel in playing a crucial political role in the founding of the PT. All of these tendencies entered the PT and promoted it as a new and unique parliamentary road to socialism in Brazil. They lionized Lula, a right-wing trade union official who swiftly cemented the closest ties with big business and imperialism. All of them bear a decisive responsibility for the absence of a left-wing alternative to the capitalist politics of the PT and the resulting ascendance of right-wing populism and the repulsive figure of Bolsonaro.

Pabloite revisionism in its various forms broke with the Trotskyist movement organized in the International Committee of the Fourth International based upon a rejection of the struggle for the building of revolutionary parties in the working

class and the fight to develop the socialist consciousness of the working class. Before the PT, they found in Castroism and the retrograde theories of guerrillaism the substitute for the revolutionary role of the working class. The promotion of this orientation led to catastrophic defeats throughout Latin America.

In the more recent period, these same tendencies hailed Hugo Chavez and a Venezuelan government with pillars in the military and finance capital, packaged as “Bolivarian socialism,” as a new revolutionary alternative, a “Pink Tide” or “left turn” that would sweep Latin America.

The world capitalist crisis that developed in 2008 and laid waste to the so-called emerging market economies has left not one stone upon another of this so-called movement. The working class has faced devastating attacks in Venezuela, Brazil, Argentina and countries where supposedly “left” governments held power, leading to the strengthening of right-wing forces.

This tendency will not be reversed, but only strengthened by the return of a PT government in Brazil. Already, Haddad is running the most right-wing campaign in the party’s history, appealing for support from the military, big business and the Catholic Church.

The working class has been utterly disenfranchised; neither candidate expresses in the slightest degree the interests of Brazilian workers.

Great struggles lie ahead. The Brazilian bourgeoisie will not be able to impose fascism or military dictatorship by means of the ballot box.

The decisive question in answering the danger of fascism is the fight to develop the workers’ political consciousness, to assimilate the bitter lessons of the experience with the PT and on that basis build a new, independent, revolutionary and internationalist party of the working class. This means building a Brazilian section of the International Committee of the Fourth International.



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