

ISO covers up Workers Party role in Bolsonaro's victory in Brazil

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6 November 2018

It has been little more than a week since the election of Jair Bolsonaro as president of Brazil. The fascistic demagogue and former army captain won 55 percent of the vote, defeating Workers Party (PT) candidate Fernando Haddad, who won 45 percent. In an election marked by overwhelming hostility to the political establishment in Brazil, a record one-third of eligible voters either abstained or cast spoiled ballots.

It has taken considerably less than a week to expose the bankruptcy of Brazil's pseudo-left, which unanimously jumped onto the PT's bandwagon and campaigned for its victory, adopting variations of the nonsensical formula of "voting for Haddad without providing the PT with political support." As shown by the post-election statements of the myriad Morenoite and Pabloite currents that operate within the Brazilian unions and universities and among the various identity politics movements of the upper-middle class, their rush to the right in the second round run-off was no episodic move. Rather, they are continuing in the wake of Bolsonaro's victory on this same right-wing course.

Recognizing kindred political spirits, the International Socialist Organization (ISO) in the US has solidarized itself with these forces, presenting a false and reactionary explanation for the election result in Brazil. The ISO's *Socialist Worker* published an October 30 article titled "How did a monster come to power in Brazil?" It was written by Todd Chretien, based on discussions with pseudo-left elements within the PSOL (Party for Socialism and Freedom), the parliamentary split-off from the PT that offered its unconditional support to the Workers Party in the second round.

The choice of the headline is revealing. Bolsonaro is a "monster," presumably having descended on Brazil from outer space or escaped from the laboratory of some mad scientist, rather than the product of the disintegration of Brazil's post-dictatorship "democratic" order, under the impact of staggering social inequality, profound economic crisis and the wholesale corruption of all of the major parties, the PT foremost among them.

Chretien presents a potted history of recent political developments in Brazil, describing Bolsonaro as having risen "from the margins of Brazil's extremist fringe." He adds that "the only man who could have plausibly defeated Bolsonaro, former President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva of the PT, sits in jail, imprisoned on trumped-up corruption charges by prosecutors and political parties which are themselves among the most corrupt in the world. When Lula proposed running for office from his prison cell, the Supreme Court barred him from doing so."

Bolsonaro did not rise from the "extremist fringe." He was rather a seven-term federal legislator and longtime member of the ruling

PT's coalition in the Brazilian Congress, one of many right-wing politicians and parties with which the PT allied itself.

As for Lula, he was denied the right to run in the election under the *Ficha Limpa* (clean slate) law that he himself enacted as part of an attempt to deflect right-wing criticism of the PT after a series of corruption scandals. Whether he would have defeated Bolsonaro is far from certain. The PT itself dropped mention of the former president in the second-round campaign amid polls indicating that the majority of the Brazilian population believed he belonged in jail.

The distorted account of the Brazilian election presented by Chretien and the ISO's friends in the Brazilian pseudo-left is aimed at denying the essence of the election, which was a referendum on the entire Brazilian political system that has been dominated by the PT since 2003.

The PT suffered its worst losses in the historically left-leaning regions of Rio Grande do Sul, Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo—those most affected by the slump in industrial activity stemming from the crisis. The reactionary austerity policies of the PT gave Bolsonaro and the far right the opportunity to pose as the sole opposition to those responsible for the crisis, first and foremost the PT.

Denying the working class hatred that exists for the PT, Chretien and the Brazilian pseudo-lefts present the vote for Bolsonaro as the advent of a mass fascist movement in Brazil, concentrated particularly in the working class, which they slander as bigoted and driven by religious prejudice.

Now these currents have, one by one, released statements announcing that they will support the political agendas of the PT-controlled "Popular Brazil Front," formed by the unions and PT allies, and its left cover, the "Fearless Peoples Front," from which the PT is formally excluded as a liability. This latter front is led by Socialism and Liberty (PSOL) presidential candidate and Lula political protégé Guilherme Boulos.

These fronts are to be further extended to "all democratic forces"—including, if possible, the right wing that the PT courted during the run-off campaign, as well as "constitutionalist" military commanders whom the PT has praised and sections of the bourgeois press, which are increasingly unnerved by Bolsonaro's Trump-style, twitter-based communications.

One of the most revealing proclamations of support for this proposed "united front" of the pseudo-left with the PT and other "democratic" sections of the Brazilian bourgeoisie and state apparatus was issued by the "Resistência" (Resistance) tendency, which Chretien promotes (posting its statement on *Socialist Worker* and interviewing its members).

Resistência is a Morenoite current that broke from Brazil's United

Socialist Workers Party (PSTU), Brazil's main Moreniste group. The split was the result of powerful class pressures from the petty-bourgeois layers gravitating back towards the PT as its crisis unfolded. It took place in the wake of Rousseff's impeachment, which the PSTU had supported.

Resistência's statement is only the most finished expression of the pro-PT fever gripping the Brazilian pseudo-left, which has drawn closer to the party precisely as it has been deserted by its former base of workers in the country's oldest industrial regions, most significantly in São Paulo's so-called ABC region of industrial cities, where it was founded in 1980 in the wake of the massive strikes that led to the fall of the 21-year-old US-backed military dictatorship.

The statement starts by parroting the PT's political line that the elections were "not democratic, stained by the barring of Lula" from running and rigged by "a criminal scheme for funneling undeclared funds to pay for the massive spread of fake news in the election."

It should be noted that the PSOL, the party within which Resistência operates, struck its blow for "democracy" by appealing to the Brazilian state, in the name of combating "fake news," to shut down Whatsapp, the social media platform most used in Brazil and which was instrumental in organizing the massive truckers' strike earlier this year and other strike and protest actions.

The statement strongly suggests that the elections and Bolsonaro's victory represented a gross violation of an otherwise healthy Brazilian democracy that could have been maintained if only Lula, who presided over vote-buying schemes in Congress and the massive corruption operation centered at the state-run oil giant Petrobras, had been freed. Of course, no mention is made of the fact that Lula had long been the principal beneficiary of corporate donations by banks, including large undeclared funds in the 2014 elections, before corporate funding was forbidden.

The PT presided for years over record banking profits and a record low number of strikes, the unprecedented growth of social inequality, the doubling of the country's prison population based on a "war on drugs" started in 2006, the government infiltration of demonstrations, and the widespread evictions and militarization of policing for the World Cup and the Olympics. This is what workers are told to regard as Brazilian "democracy"—and to close ranks around Lula to defend. Those who disagree are deluded by "fake news" from the Bolsonaro campaign.

Revealingly, the statement then goes on to promote a "United Front," to be built with the "whole of the left—the PT, PSOL, PCdoB, PCB, PSTU, etc." [emphasis added]. This *etc.*—casually inserted—is meant to conceal the real allies sought by the PT, that is, the political and economic representatives of Brazilian and international big business whom the Workers Party will seek to win to its side, promoting itself as a more reliable custodian of profit interests than Bolsonaro.

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Rooting itself firmly in identity politics, the statement goes on to declare, "Building this united front must take as its starting point the women's movement that united against Bolsonaro [#EleNão], putting more than 1 million people in the streets on September 29, and the spontaneous street movement led by tens of thousands of activists in the runoff election."

As to the class character of the #EleNão (#NotHim) protests, Resistência is silent. A University of São Paulo profile of the demonstrators concluded that fully 86 percent had a bachelor's degree

or were pursuing one—a major indicator of class composition in a country where 52 percent of adults have not completed high school. Fully 57 percent had a monthly income of more than 4,770 reais (the equivalent of five minimum wages), with the threshold for membership in the richest 10 percent in Brazil being 5.214 reais.

While the September 29 demonstrations certainly attracted wider layers than those expected by their feminist leadership, it is even more certain that they were ignored by workers, including women workers. Welcomed onto their platform were right-wing candidates who happened to be women, including the agribusiness mogul Kátia Abreu and Marina Silva, the ex-PT environmental minister who is politically sponsored by the heir to Brazil's largest private bank, Itaú.

The orientation is clear. Opposition to Bolsonaro is to be based not upon the struggles of the Brazilian working class, but rather on privileged layers of the middle class, centered on identity politics and subordinated to Brazilian and international capital.

The *Socialist Worker* article concludes with a statement from a Resistência leader from Rio de Janeiro, who tells the ISO: "Just as you in the US need international solidarity in your battle with Trump, your support for our side will be decisive in the future of the class struggle in Brazil."

The ISO's "battle with Trump" is entirely subordinated to the Democratic Party. It is focused on the right-wing identity politics of the #MeToo campaign and aligned with the differences of the Democrats and their allies in the State Department and the CIA with Trump over foreign policy, particularly over the demand for a more aggressive policy against Russia and Syria. The ISO has sought to legitimize the imperialist intervention in Syria by promoting the fiction of a "Syrian democratic revolution" armed and funded by the CIA.

That the ISO and Resistência recognize themselves as international allies only underscores the reactionary role played by both organizations in their respective countries. Neither has anything to do with Marxism, and their socialist rhetoric is merely a cover for bourgeois and imperialist politics. The politics of both organizations express the interests not of workers, but of privileged layers of the petty bourgeoisie and are directed, in the final analysis, at derailing and suppressing the development of an independent revolutionary movement of the working class.

The election of Bolsonaro in Brazil underscores the serious dangers confronting the Brazilian and international working class. They cannot be answered by subordinating workers to some "democratic front" dominated by the PT and other parties of the ruling class.

Genuine socialists must make clear to the Brazilian working class that the "monster" Bolsonaro did not fall from the sky or rise from the pits of hell, but is the product of the underlying crisis of Brazilian capitalism and the breakdown of the existing bourgeois political order, with the PT at its center. The struggle for the independent revolutionary mobilization of the working class in Brazil can begin only with an irreconcilable break with the Workers Party and all of the pseudo-left organizations that orbit and promote it.



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