Municipal elections expose rightward turn of Brazilian ruling class

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Brazil held the first round of its municipal elections on Sunday. The electoral process was marked by the highest abstention rate in the last 20 years, surpassing 23 percent. It also saw an accelerated shift by the Brazilian bourgeoisie to the right, with fascistic attacks against the democratic system and an escalation of state surveillance over social media.

One of the factors contributing to the low voter turnout, in a country where voting is mandatory, was the uncontrolled COVID-19 pandemic in Brazil. After a decrease in contamination rates in September and October, Brazil is registering a rapid rise in coronavirus cases, with averages of new cases and deaths nearly doubling in the last 10 days, according to *Worldometer*data. Brazil already has a total of more than 5.9 million cases and 166,000 deaths.

But the abstentions also expressed the discrediting of the entire Brazilian political system in the eyes of broad sections of the working class, which is increasingly dissatisfied with the conditions of mass poverty and social inequality.

There were a significant number of protest votes, which added to the abstentions, surpassing the votes for the first-place mayoral candidates in 483 Brazilian cities, including 18 capitals. In the country's largest city, São Paulo, protest votes and abstentions reached 3.6 million, while the votes for the top two candidates added up to just 2.8 million.

The election was a fiasco for the Workers Party (PT), which governed the country for 14 years, as well as for the candidates supported by Brazil's President Jair Bolsonaro. The PT, which in 2012 was elected in the first round in 630 cities, won only 179 municipal elections this year. Bolsonaro, whose fascist party Alliance for Brazil, which he founded in 2019, has not yet been officially recognized, supported 59 candidates, with only 10 them elected.

There was also a significant drop in the number of candidates elected by the traditional bourgeois parties, the Brazilian Social Democratic Party (PSDB) and Brazilian Democratic Movement (MDB). The parties that registered the largest gains were the Progressive Party (PP) and the Democrats (DEM), the latter having won six capital cities in the first round.

These results were enthusiastically celebrated by the Brazilian media, which characterized them as a victory for "traditional" politics and for "democracy." In an editorial, *Folha de S. Paulo* celebrated the "choice of moderate conservatives" and stated: "Two years ago, the national and state elections were characterized by a right-wing wave, often with populist and authoritarian tones, and a rejection of traditional politicians and parties. This scenario has changed."

The conservative *O Estado de S. Paulo*, following the same line, declared: "The debacle of Bolsonaroism and Lula-PTism at the polls, two years after they starred in the polarization that plunged the country into an unprecedented moral crisis, is great news for Brazilian democracy. ... Traditional politics is being valued again."

The political perspective highlighted in this farcical celebration of the Brazilian municipal elections closely resembled the hailing by these same media outlets of Joe Biden's victory in the US elections. *Folha* and *Estadao* praised Biden as a "traditional" and "moderate" politician and considered his election a milestone in the collapse of a "right-wing populist" wave around the world.

But, while a section of the Brazilian bourgeoisie seeks to mirror itself in the reactionary model of the US Democratic Party, the political allies of Bolsonaro have literally mimicked Donald Trump's false accusations of electoral fraud.

A delay in the release of poll results, which in Brazil are held in electronic ballot boxes (not connected to the Internet), and vague reports of hacker attacks on the Supreme Electoral Court (STE) were used by fascistic figures connected to the President to declare the entire process illegitimate, setting a dangerous precedent for future elections.

Federal Congresswoman Carla Zambelli, co-founder of Bolsonaro's Alliance for Brazil, declared on Twitter: "Now more than ever we have to talk about #PrintedVote again as a way to check the electronic voting. Nobody will convince me that the system crashes that way without fraud

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involved." The son of the President, Congressman Eduardo Bolsonaro, tweeted: "This brings a climate of insecurity, which makes people suspicious that the delay in the disclosure could be a new hacker attack or manipulation, since there is no transparency [in the process]."

As in the United States, the claims that the election of "traditional" right-wing politicians is an effective way to contain the fascistic forces in Brazilian society are absolutely false. The dictatorial threats emerge not from the sick mind of a Trump or a Bolsonaro, but from the response of the ruling elites to the deep crisis of capitalism and the resulting eruption of class struggle.

That the DEM and PP—both heirs of ARENA, the party of the bloody Brazilian military dictatorship of 1964–1985—have consolidated themselves as the major "center" parties of bourgeois politics in Brazil is a clear sign that the capitalist political system as a whole has moved sharply to the right.

This right-wing shift of the Brazilian ruling class was manifested in the unprecedented number of military candidates running in this year's elections. It was not only the traditional right wing. The PT and its pseudo-left satellite, the Socialism and Freedom Party (PSOL), ran no fewer than 152 candidates coming from the Military Police or the armed forces. Of the 8,422 military candidates running in Brazil, about 10 percent were elected: 50 mayors and 809 council members.

The 2020 elections also witnessed an ominous escalation in the policing of social media in the name of fighting "fake news." Hundreds of police intelligence officers were deployed in each state to carry out this task. Supreme Electoral Court Minister Luis Roberto Barroso declared: "We are preparing for a war against fake news," hailing an unprecedented level of collaboration between the Brazilian state and "all technology companies."

The demand that the Brazilian state censor "fake news" has been championed by the pseudo-left PSOL, which went so far as to demand during the 2018 elections that the Supreme Court block WhatsApp nationwide for this purpose.

The more prominent role played by the PSOL in these elections, going into the second round in two state capitals, is being welcomed by the Brazilian bourgeoisie. *Estadao*, in an article titled "DEM and PSOL cease to be supporting parties," stated that the latter represents "the new left—more identitarian and cultural, in the young outskirts of Brazil; people who see the PT as 'old'." That is, it clearly recognizes PSOL as a party of the petty bourgeoisie, completely hostile to the working class movement.

The main race being run by the PSOL is for the city of São Paulo, where its candidate for mayor, the anti-Marxist professor and leader of the Movement of Homeless Workers (MTST) Guilherme Boulos, is competing with current Mayor Bruno Covas of the PSDB.

Covas is attacking Boulos in the same spirit as the editorials in *Folha* and *Estadao,* and has declared that "experience beat radicalism in the first round and experience will beat radicalism in the second round." But the pseudo-left candidate is doing everything to prove that this is not the case.

In the first debate of the second round of the elections in São Paulo, broadcast on Monday by *CNN*, Boulos exposed his thoroughly bourgeois program. In addition to minimizing the possibilities of a second wave of COVID-19 in São Paulo, ignoring the already accelerating growth in the number of cases and hospital admissions in the city, he reaffirmed his party's reactionary approach to the military.

Boulos stated in the debate that the "problem of public security" in São Paulo cannot be solved with "street lighting," as Covas has tried to do, but requires the hiring of more police! Boulos complained that the city's local police, the Metropolitan Civil Guard (GCM), has far fewer officers than Rio de Janeiro, and declared: "The role of the GCM is to be in the neighborhoods and to identify, through community policing, where are the focal points of crime, conflicts...following the examples of the security models that best work around the world."

As protests against police brutality are exploding all over the world, one wonders what model for state violence against the working class and youth is most appealing to this pseudo-leftist charlatan.

The Morenoites of the MRT, who in a slander against the *World Socialist Web Site* claimed to be "the only leftist organization on Brazilian soil that is fighting a principled struggle against the police and the militarization of politics," are criminally covering up the reactionary outlook of the PSOL and promoting its election in São Paulo. With their characteristic opportunist politics, they support Boulos through a series of articles that call for a "struggle to confront, reject, and defeat Covas."

In order to fight the turn by the ruling class towards dictatorship in Brazil and internationally, the working class needs to establish an independent political movement against capitalism, decisively rejecting the political influence of every bourgeois and petty-bourgeois tendency.

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