

Candidate of Brazil's pseudo-left PSOL loses in São Paulo as party prepares new betrayals

Tomas Castanheira
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The second round of Brazil's municipal elections took place last Sunday, two weeks after the first. Great hopes had been placed by the pseudo-left and bourgeois "left" parties in the candidacy of Guilherme Boulos, the Socialism and Freedom Party (PSOL) candidate for mayor of São Paulo. *Jacobin* magazine had announced internationally: "Brazil's Largest City May Soon Have a Socialist Mayor."

However, Boulos was defeated by incumbent Mayor Bruno Covas of the right-wing Brazilian Social Democratic Party (PSDB), who was reelected with about 60 percent of the valid votes. Boulos' candidacy, however, signaled the growing importance of the PSOL for Brazilian bourgeois politics.

The municipal elections of 2020 were overshadowed by the conditions of widespread social crisis and mass suffering in Brazil, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The coronavirus, which hit the country in March, remains absolutely out of control. The criminal policy promoted by all the ruling class parties has already caused the deaths of more than 175,000 Brazilians.

Brazil's social inequality, already the worst in the world, has reached intolerable levels. Nearly 10 million workers have lost their jobs and another 11 million have suffered wage cuts since the beginning of the pandemic, even as Brazilian billionaires have substantially increased their fortunes.

The deep dissatisfaction of the Brazilian working class with their social conditions and the criminal administration of fascist President Jair Bolsonaro did not result, however, in a surge of votes for the traditional parties of the bourgeois "left," on the contrary. The Workers Party (PT), which governed Brazil for 14 years, saw its control of city halls substantially reduced and, for the first in its history, failed to win a mayoral race in a single Brazilian capital.

The social opposition of the working class manifested itself in the rejection of the bourgeois political system as whole, which has been growing since the last municipal elections in 2016. In São Paulo, more than 30 percent of voters did not turn out for the second round; this in a country where voting is compulsory. Protest votes and abstentions totaled 3.6 million, surpassing the 3.1 million votes cast for the winner, Covas. This number increased more than 40 percent compared to the 2012 elections, when it was 2.5 million.

The scenario was even more critical in Brazil's second largest metropolis, Rio de Janeiro. About 50 percent of the Rio de Janeiro population refused to choose between two right-wing candidates,

Eduardo Paes, of the Democrats (DEM), and Republican incumbent Marcelo Crivella. Supported by the PT and PSOL's prominent leader in Rio Marcelo Freixo, Paes, whose party is a successor to ARENA, the political instrument of the former military dictatorship, won the race with 1.6 million votes, considerably less than the 2.3 million votes that were never cast.

On election day, while the working class was rejecting bourgeois candidates at the polls, some 2,500 transportation workers in Rio de Janeiro staged a strike demanding unpaid back wages. The walkout expressed the increasingly explosive social situation in Brazil. Dozens of similar militant transportation strikes have taken place every month throughout the country since the beginning of the pandemic.

In the face of growing class tensions, which point to an imminent eruption of social struggle, the ruling class recognized the political utility of the PSOL, which contested control over the country's main urban center and was elected in one capital city.

Folha de S. Paulo published an editorial on the eve of the election titled "The turn of the professionals," in which, avoiding to take a stand for Boulos or Covas, it stated that both are "legitimate representatives of what is conventionally called professional politics," that is, bourgeois politics. It praised the "years of experience in leading popular movements" of the PSOL candidate.

The conservative mouthpiece of São Paulo's bourgeoisie, *Estado de S. Paulo*, declared itself in favor of Covas, warning against an "adventure" with the election of Guilherme Boulos in São Paulo. The newspaper stated, however, that "we must recognize that Boulos has shown himself to be mature." It continued, "He will certainly be a strong name for the left in future disputes, emerging as the leader of a reorganization of the parties that until recently orbited the PT and Lula da Silva. In the end, this should be his role in next Sunday's election."

His campaign for mayor of São Paulo was the second time professor Guilherme Boulos has been a candidate. In 2018, he ran as the PSOL candidate for president of Brazil. Then he received about 600,000 votes nationally, or 1.5 million fewer than he won in the second-round elections in São Paulo.

Before joining the PSOL in 2018, Boulos built his political career as the leader of the Homeless Workers Movement (MTST), an organization he joined while still a university student. The MTST emerged at the end of the 1990s as an urban branch of the Landless Workers Movement (MST). Adopting the methods and

political conceptions of that peasant movement in defense of agrarian reform, the MTST promotes the occupation of abandoned land in big cities, where it demands that the state finance the construction of popular housing.

Jacobin's article describes a mythical emergence of Boulos as a figure in Brazilian politics in 2003, the year of Lula's presidential inauguration. In that year, the MTST "occupied a huge abandoned Volkswagen site" in São Bernardo do Campo, the political cradle of the PT. "The boldness of Boulos' action" says the pseudo-left magazine, "launched him into the limelight and toward the center of a political current that was still in its earliest stages of development: the left-wing opposition to the PT government."

This supposed "opposition to the PT government" developed, in fact, as a relationship of deep material dependence. The MTST influence was leveraged nationally through the PT's Minha Casa Minha Vida (My House My Life) housing program, which channeled funds into Boulos' movement to manage the construction of popular housing. The occupations and other actions of "pressure" against the government carried out by the MTST served as a pseudo-radical façade for the operations of the bourgeois state.

Notably, a manifesto launched by "a group of 50 businessmen and executives from the productive and financial sector" in support of Boulos' candidacy in São Paulo praised his experience with the MTST, describing Boulos as "a successful social and political entrepreneur." The manifesto continues: "He takes off from a certain anachronism of the left on themes such as work, entrepreneurship and partnerships with the private sector."

Jacobin's hagiography notwithstanding, Boulos was never a socialist. During his campaign, he emphasized that his so-called "radical" politics strictly respect the limits of Brazilian bourgeois laws, and that he intends to fight not private property, but "mafia schemes" in the city.

Boulos gained a prominent role in national politics with the crisis of the PT's rule, shaken by the recession of the Brazilian capitalist economy and culminating in the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff at the end of 2015. Boulos' phony image as a popular leader dissociated from the PT's betrayals made him the ideal representative of the petty bourgeois pseudo-left represented by the PSOL.

The PSOL is consciously preparing to repeat in Brazil the kind of betrayals committed by Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain, with which it shares the same "left-wing populism" and hostility to socialism and the working class. Boulos' campaign in São Paulo represented an important step in this direction.

For the first time, the PSOL occupied the center of an electoral alliance with bourgeois parties, not the other way around. This was launched in the form of a so-called "Democratic Front" in the second round, which involved, in addition to the PT, the Labor Democratic Party (PDT) of Ciro Gomes, the "eco-capitalist" Rede Sustentabilidade (Sustainability Network) of Marina Silva, and the Maoist Communist Party of Brazil (PCdoB).

Demonstrating his total submission to his bourgeois partners, Boulos declared: "I want to form an alliance because I don't have the arrogance to think that I know everything, that I will rule the city alone, that we are self-sufficient." This pathetic show of

humility was merely a façade for this petty-bourgeois impostor's complete lack of principles and his willingness to accept whatever tasks demanded by the ruling class.

In the elections, the PSOL followed the right-wing shift of the Brazilian ruling class as a whole, promoting a series of military candidates, thereby supposedly challenging Bolsonaro for his fascistic support base. Boulos reinforced this policy by making a firm defense of São Paulo's local police, the Metropolitan Civil Guard (GCM), arguing that the "problem of public security" can only be solved by hiring more police and making it present in the neighborhoods.

A deepening of this reactionary political line is being prepared, as Boulos made clear in an interview published by *Jacobin* on November 28. "It's our task to work to leave Bolsonaro as isolated as possible in society," he said. "This means even welcoming sectors of the old Brazilian right-wing distancing themselves and breaking with Bolsonaro." Boulos openly defended an alliance with these right-wing sectors, through an "anti-Bolsonaro coalition ... in which all those who share this banner belong".

These lines serve as a political condemnation, not only of the PSOL, but of all the political currents that foment illusions in this petty-bourgeois opportunist party.

Expressing the interests and mentality of the upper middle class, the post-modernist philosopher revered by Brazil's pseudo-left, Vladimir Safatle, declared that the election of Boulos would mean "the beginning of the end of the ordinary fascism that rules the country today." This statement is based on the complete denial of the objective material bases that give rise to fascism in society, that is, the mortal crisis of the capitalist system, of which the PSOL is an avid defender. Wallowing in his reactionary idealism, Safatle concluded by calling for a symbolic transformation of society: "Let's seize power. It is time to give another meaning to the word 'government'."

Not for nothing, Safatle was one of the public supporters of the candidates of the Morenoite Revolutionary Workers Movement (MRT), linked to the so-called "Trotskyist Faction" (FT-CI), who ran on the PSOL ticket in São Paulo. Both are based on the same reactionary class interests and hostility to Marxism.

The warnings of the *World Socialist Web Site* over the right-wing shift of the PSOL and the covering-up of these maneuvers by the Morenoites have proven totally correct. A genuine struggle against social inequality and the growth of fascism can be waged only through the independent mobilization of the working class, fighting for a socialist and internationalist program and against the political influence of the petty-bourgeois pseudo-left.

The International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) and its supporters of the Brazilian Socialist Equality Group (GSI) are the only true defenders of this revolutionary perspective in Brazil.



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