

State Department socialists: The sinister operations of Jacobin and the DSA in Brazil

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The *World Socialist Web Site* issued an open letter to the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) responding to neo-Stalinist attacks by DSA leaders against Leon Trotsky and the current representatives of his revolutionary legacy, the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) and its affiliated Socialist Equality Parties.

The WSWWS revealed that this campaign—with memes and statements celebrating the murder of Trotsky and the assassin himself, Ramon Mercader, and resurrecting the anti-Trotskyist slanders that served as justification for mass murder of revolutionaries under Stalin's Terror—was carefully coordinated by major figures in the DSA leadership with extensive connections to the Democratic Party.

By attacking Trotskyism through its DSA agents, the Democratic Party, a ruthless defender of Wall Street and US imperialism, is reacting to the growing movement of the working class in the US. Part of a global resurgence of the class struggle, this movement is clashing with the reactionary trade union apparatus and the bourgeois political system as a whole. The ruling class recognizes that this movement finds conscious expression in the WSWWS, which has a growing audience among militant workers and socialist-minded youth, including within the DSA's own ranks.

The development of a genuine socialist movement, not only in the United States but internationally, requires that the working class learn to recognize the nefarious political role played by organizations like the DSA, the politics of which reflect the interests of the affluent middle class. In each country, organizations that share this same class character and pseudo-left politics are acting to divide the working class along national, ethnic, racial and gender lines and subordinate it to capitalism and its state.

This struggle is especially significant in Brazil and Latin America, where in recent decades workers have gone through the experience of the bourgeois Pink Tide governments, which, despite their populist rhetoric, failed to resolve the deep social, economic and political contradictions that have historically affected the region.

The DSA is also the political force behind *Jacobin* magazine, founded and edited by its member Bhaskar Sunkara. *Jacobin* has consistently acted to sow illusions in the supposedly progressive—and even “socialist”—character of the corrupt Pink Tide governments. In recent years, *Jacobin* has sought to mount an incursion into Brazil and Latin America. It inaugurated in 2019 both a Brazilian edition, in Portuguese, and a Latin American one, in Spanish.

These international operations have a sinister character. The DSA is a faction of the Democratic Party, which has historically oppressed Latin America, launching dozens of invasions, coups and interventions in the region over the past century.

The DSA's historical pedigree

The DSA's own pedigree is bound up with these crimes. It traces its origins to the Democratic Socialists Organizing Committee (DSOC), founded by Michael Harrington in the early 1970s. Harrington was an acolyte of Max Shachtman, who drifted far to the right after renouncing the defense of the Soviet Union against imperialism and breaking with the Trotskyist movement in 1940. Shachtman embraced Cold War anti-communism and became a political adviser to the AFL-CIO bureaucracy.

Among the leading Shachtmanite cadre was Tom Kahn, who in the 1980s would become director of the AFL-CIO's Department of International Affairs (later the Solidarity Center) as it defended the operations of US imperialism, particularly in the bloody counter-insurgency wars in El Salvador and Guatemala and the CIA Contra war against Nicaragua.

The anti-communist AFL-CIO bureaucracy's role in Central America was in continuity with its previous intervention in Brazil through its American Institute for Free Labor Development (AIFLD), a front for the CIA. The AIFLD trained and funded right-wing union leaders, including in the telephone and telegraph union, who backed the 1964 military coup that overthrew President Joao Goulart and ushered in two decades of dictatorship.

Also coming out of this tendency was Carl Gershman, who became president of the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) in 1984, a position he holds to this day. The NED was created to carry out overtly the kind of financing of pro-US parties and unions that the CIA previously funded covertly. It has played a key role in Washington's regime change operations in the region, from Nicaragua in the 1980s to Venezuela, funding leaders of the 2002 coup against Hugo Chávez and backing US puppet Juan Guaidó to this day.

The current turn of the DSA—a servile defender of the corporatist AFL-CIO apparatus—and *Jacobin* to Latin America must be understood within this historical context. While presenting a “left” face, they are part of US imperialism's response to the emergence of an unprecedented political crisis in the region.

The past five years, since the shipwreck of the brief commodities boom, have been marked by accelerated growth in poverty, unemployment and an intensification of already grotesque levels of social inequality. The Pink Tide parties, which have gone on to implement capitalist readjustment programs, have been widely discredited, together with bourgeois establishment as a whole.

The opposition of workers and youth to the existing capitalist setup emerged in mass protests and strikes in different countries of the region, particularly since 2019. Both the social catastrophe and the radicalization of the masses have been sharply exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which is leaving a trail of death and destruction across Latin America.

Latin American workers can only achieve their social demands by definitively breaking the political grip of all the parties representing the interests of the national bourgeoisies, regardless of the “left” rhetoric with which they seek to cover themselves. Only by this means can they unify

their struggles across national borders, directing their appeals to their class brothers in the region and also in the imperialist countries, and adopt a revolutionary socialist leadership and political program. *Jacobin*'s efforts are aimed precisely at heading off such a revolutionary development.

The reactionary political amalgam of *Jacobin Brasil*

Since its founding in 2019, *Jacobin*'s Brazilian edition has sought to introduce itself in Brazil as an authoritative voice of socialism. With this aim, it brought together the Brazilian representatives of Pabloite revisionism and its Morenoite variants—which falsely present themselves as Trotskyists—with Stalinism and academic identity politics.

The person chosen to head the magazine's political project, in close coordination with DSA's Sunkara, was Sabrina Fernandes, who had already contributed to the American *Jacobin*. Besides being a prominent YouTuber in Brazil and an academic, Fernandes is a leading member of the Socialism and Freedom Party's (PSOL) tendency Subverta, which is affiliated to the Pabloite international and defines itself as an "ecosocialist and libertarian collective."

Fernandes' international connections are worth noting. She began her academic career in Canada, where she affiliated herself to the reactionary New Democratic Party (NDP). She is currently a postdoctoral fellow of the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, an institution linked to the German state and the pseudo-left Die Link (The Left), which is also funding *Jacobin Brasil*.

The mainstream Brazilian magazine *Época* (usually uninterested in left politics) published an extensive and flattering profile of Fernandes. Speaking to the magazine about her political foundations, she declared: "It is common for the radical left to say 'Oh, because Lenin wrote this, because Trotsky did that' and try to give these answers to the different problems we have today. I claim that legacy, but we can't be anachronistic."

This emblematic statement is fully aligned with *Jacobin*'s reactionary purposes. The magazine wants to claim the legacy of Lenin and Trotsky only to repudiate and combat it in every essential aspect, particularly their struggle to establish an independent political party of the working class, hostile to the influences of the petty bourgeoisie, and the struggle for the overthrow of the bourgeois state. *Jacobin*'s aims emerged in its first Brazilian issue, titled "Marx & Co." The cover of the magazine was a comic-style illustration with cut-outs of historical figures, putting in Marx's "company" notorious anti-Marxists: bourgeois nationalists like Salvador Allende, leaders of Brazil's Stalinist Communist Party, and Stalin himself. Some of the authors have publicly expressed discomfort particularly with the publication of an article by Brazilian Communist Party (PCB) member Jones Manoel, an open defender of Stalin and his historical "contributions."

This episode shed light on the operations that preceded *Jacobin*'s publication in Brazil. Answering the issues raised by professors Sean Purdy of the PSOL and Ruy Braga, a former member of the Morenoite PSTU, who wrote on Facebook that "they should have warned before" about Jones Manoel's participation, Sabrina Fernandes stated: "But there was a warning before ... when Bhaskar came I explained that the magazine has a wide range that extends to the PCB on certain topics. The article is not about Stalin, you haven't even read it yet. Anti-communism criminalizes all of us, that is the lesson of our political situation."

The message is clear: First, the inclusion of a representative of Stalinism in the magazine was not accidental, but a deliberate guideline laid down with the DSA. And second, any attempt to educate the new generation becoming radicalized on the historical divide between Stalinism and

Marxism—a division that, in Trotsky's words, is a river of blood—will be furiously attacked by *Jacobin* as "anti-communism."

Jacobin's quest for Lula

Jacobin has its focused efforts in recent months on a campaign to present former Workers Party (PT) President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (commonly known as Lula) and the possibility of a new PT administration as the solution to Brazil's profound social and political crisis.

For 14 years the PT ruled Brazil in the interests of the capitalist class and in alliance with the most reactionary forces within its political establishment, including the country's current fascistic President Jair Bolsonaro. The immense discrediting of the PT among workers and the party's promotion of the military and right-wing forces paved the way for Bolsonaro's rise to the presidency.

After being convicted on corruption charges involving Brazil's major construction companies, Lula was barred from running in the last presidential election in 2018. In March of this year, however, the proceedings against Lula were ruled legally flawed and the convictions annulled by the Supreme Court, restoring his political rights in the run-up to the 2022 presidential election.

This news was intensely celebrated by *Jacobin*, and it has continued publishing a series of articles with titles such as "Lula is back – and he can save Brazil from Bolsonaro." Once Lula assumes the "leadership of social movements and left forces," he will confront the social crisis, restore democracy in Brazil, and even "take the lead globally in the fight for universal access to vaccines"—so claims *Jacobin Brasil*'s editor Hugo Albuquerque. In his opinion, all of these wonders are possible without any break with capitalism, quite the opposite.

Albuquerque makes clear that his hopes are based on signs that Lula is being rehabilitated by the Brazilian financial oligarchy. He states that "the rapid advance of the Brazilian crisis could very well augur a new outlook among the country's oligarchy. ... [T]he ruling class may begin to revise the wisdom of its longstanding anything-but-the-Workers-Party stance."

No doubt, within the Democratic Party administration of President Joe Biden and the US State Department there are also those who believe the interests of US imperialism would be in safer hands under Lula than Bolsonaro. As a faction of the Democratic Party, the DSA provides a "left" face for these tactical considerations in Washington.

To cover this pro-capitalist policy with pseudo-revolutionary language, *Jacobin* enlisted the services of a specialist, the veteran of the Morenoite movement Valério Arcary. Arcary had held positions in the PT leadership before his organization, Convergência Socialista, was expelled from the party in the early 1990s and formed the PSTU. Today he leads PSOL's Morenoite tendency Resistance.

In his article "For a United Front with an anti-capitalist program," he makes grotesque distortions of the politics of Lenin and Trotsky and shamelessly falsifies the history of the Russian Revolution. He attempts to justify PSOL's support for a Lula candidacy by equating it with the demand "All power to the soviets" raised by the Bolsheviks after the February Revolution of 1917. "Who ran the soviets?", Arcary asks, and answers, "The moderate Menshevik and SR leaderships." He consciously omits the very existence of the bourgeois Provisional Government which was supported by the treacherous leadership of the soviets, against which the slogan drawn up by Lenin was turned. The aim is to portray the Bolsheviks as their opposite: spineless left supporters of the bourgeoisie, seeking to pressure its leadership to the left! In other words, equating them with the PSOL.

The significance of *Jacobin*'s operations to disrupt the development of a

genuine socialist movement in Brazil was recognized by Lula himself. Around two weeks ago, Lula tweeted pictures of himself holding up copies of *Jacobin Brasil* and asking his followers, “Have you read it yet?!”

But these efforts are doomed to fail. Each new step in the development of the crisis of world capitalism is throwing the working class in Brazil and internationally on the road to socialist revolution and at the same time exposing ever more deeply the visceral hostility of these petty-bourgeois impostors to genuine socialism.

The struggle of the International Committee of the Fourth International to clarify the anti-Marxist nature of these tendencies and the historical roots of their treachery and to promote a real internationalist socialist program is laying the groundwork for creating a new revolutionary leadership in the Brazilian working class that will lead it to political power.



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