

First presidential debate in Brazil: Silence on Bolsonaro's coup threats

Eduardo Parati**6 September 2022**

On August 28, the first debate of the Brazilian presidential elections took place, with the participation of five candidates. The debate had an unprecedented simultaneous presence of the current fascistic President Jair Bolsonaro of the Liberal Party (PL), and former president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva of the Workers Party (PT).

The historic impasse faced by the Brazilian ruling class lent a hysterical tone to the debate. The event was dominated by accusations of corruption in the PT and Bolsonaro administrations and about the "misogynistic" behavior of the current president. This exchange of accusations, however, exposed the nervousness of all sections of the political establishment, unable to propose a way out of the enormous economic, political, and social crisis gripping Brazil.

To the extent that Lula felt compelled to talk about Bolsonaro's indifferent response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the declining social conditions of the working class, these problems were reduced to simple mismanagement and corruption of the government and the president himself.

Lula's initial statements about a "war against the educational gap left by the pandemic" failed to include the fact that the pandemic is far from over. More than 800 deaths from COVID-19 occur every week, and the country's health care system remains overwhelmed as a result of the latest wave caused by Omicron subvariants BA.4/5.

Following the lead of his own party's governors, Lula will allow millions of children to remain in school, indifferent to the risks of contagion and the emergence of even more transmissible and deadly variants. Despite Lula's rhetorical thrusts against Bolsonaro for the appalling 680,000 COVID-19 deaths

in Brazil, the former president has not indicated any significant measures against the pandemic that he would adopt once elected.

The reality is that an eventual PT government will allow endless mass transmission, sickness and deaths, just as has been done by all self-proclaimed "left-wing" governments in Latin America.

The discussion in the second part of the debate about the current 600 reais (US\$ 115) financial aid and its continuation next year only succeeded in highlighting that neither candidate has an answer to Bolsonaro's particularly criminal claim that "there is no hunger in Brazil." With vast numbers of people being thrown into poverty, and 350,000 joining the line every day since April to receive the aid, Lula has limited himself to assuring that the aid would continue in 2023.

The increasingly heated accusations about Bolsonaro's "hatred of women" during the three-hour debate contrasted with complete silence about the greatest crisis of bourgeois democracy in Brazil for four decades. In particular, no one pointed to Bolsonaro's coup threats that he will not accept an unfavorable outcome at the polls in October.

Lula made no reference to the recent attacks on PT rallies, nor to the murder of Marcelo Arruda, the party's treasurer, in Foz do Iguaçu, by a declared supporter of Bolsonaro in early July. Nor did he mention Bolsonaro's statements praising the deadly police operations in Rio de Janeiro's *favelas* in recent months. None of the candidates has denounced Bolsonaro for his cultivation of fascistic forces in the police and military apparatus.

Bolsonaro has been casting doubt on the results of the polls since he was elected in 2018, when he contested the runoff with the PT's current candidate for governor of São Paulo, Fernando Haddad. In recent months,

Bolsonaro has been putting his statements into practice, working closely with sections in the Army's senior brass. His defense minister, Gen. Paulo Sergio de Oliveira, has repeatedly attacked the Electoral Court, countering the digital vote count with the initiation of a "parallel vote" with printed ballots.

In reality, the representatives of the ruling elite present at the debate could not attack Bolsonaro's efforts to stage a coup and establish an authoritarian regime because they have themselves played a decisive role in covering up the threats and accommodating the military and reactionary social forces that support the fascistic president.

CBN radio reported that Lula's campaign met in August with high-ranking military officers, who declared their opposition to a coup not because of their defense of democracy, but because of the "price of attrition that an eventual coup d'état would generate." The PT responded by assuring the officers that any changes in commissioned posts would take place under the tutelage of the military itself. The meeting took place just a few months after Lula declared that he would "remove almost 8,000 military officers" from government posts if elected.

Three months ago, ultra-right military institutes, with the support of Vice President Hamilton Mourão and the intelligence agencies, launched the document "Nation Project, Brazil in 2035," presenting a plan to eliminate all political opposition and consolidate a dictatorship in Brazil by the next decade. The challenges to the national bourgeoisie listed by this fascistic military manifesto do not essentially diverge from what the PT itself proposes to address in its opposition to Bolsonaro: the alleged diplomatic isolation and geopolitical weakness of Brazil, and the inability of the current president to maintain "internal security."

In addition to accommodating every advance of the military, the PT coalition is responding to Bolsonaro's coup threats by promoting the strengthening of the repressive state apparatus. By placing all responsibility for countering Bolsonaro's fascistic threats on Justice Alexandre de Moraes of the Supreme Court (STF), the PT is covering up the increasingly authoritarian attacks by the STF itself, including the censorship of Lula's supporters in the Workers Cause Party (PCO).

The debate took place 10 days before the fascist demonstrations called by the president for

Independence Day on September 7, and one month before the first round of the elections. While his so-called "left" opponents made promises of a revival of Brazil's decadent capitalism, Bolsonaro ended the debate with a rabid anti-communist statement.

Referring to his claims that he is in a "fight of good against evil," he said: "Other candidates, excuse me, but these elections are polarized. Who has the ex-con (referring to Lula) supported in the past?" He then listed self-proclaimed "left-wing" governments in Latin America, including that of Hugo Chávez in Venezuela, Alberto Fernández in Argentina, and Gabriel Boric in Chile. He later attacked Lula's vice president, Geraldo Alckmin, according to him "a religious man, Catholic, but who decided to sing the Socialist International."

Despite the false equivalence between the "Pink Tide" governments and socialism, Bolsonaro's fascistic rhetoric appeals to the growing sections of the Brazilian ruling class that fear an inevitable social explosion developing into a socialist revolution.

The elections in Brazil take place amidst extreme social tensions in which the working class is going through the third year of the pandemic with no end in sight and is experiencing rising food and fuel prices as the imperialist powers of the US and NATO risk nuclear war with Russia and China.

Faced with a huge upsurge in the international class struggle, with its most intense expression in the expulsion of President Rajapakse from Sri Lanka, the ruling class in Brazil is preparing to respond with repression of all political opposition. The Brazilian and international working class must oppose this reactionary policy with the internationalist and socialist program of the International Committee of the Fourth International against imperialist war, poverty, inequality and dictatorship.



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