

Brazilian Workers Party turns sharply to the right a week before elections

Miguel Andrade
27 September 2022

In the final week of Brazil's general election campaign, the country's fascistic President Jair Bolsonaro has continued to warn that he will not recognize any result except for his outright victory in the first round.

Following the playbook of former US president Donald Trump in the preparation for his January 6, 2021 Capitol coup attempt, Bolsonaro has relentlessly declared for four years that the Brazilian electronic voting system is being actively rigged to favor the front-runner in the polls, former president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, of the Workers Party (PT). In recent weeks, he has attacked as part of this supposed conspiracy the polling institutes that unanimously show him trailing Lula by over 10 percentage points.

Much more gravely, he has succeeded in integrating the Brazilian armed forces, which imposed a brutal dictatorship backed by US imperialism between 1964 and 1985, in his operation to discredit Brazil's voting machines. The military is mounting an operation to "audit" the vote separately from the country's Electoral Court (TSE). This operation, which finally received a cowardly endorsement from the Electoral Court president, Supreme Court Justice Alexandre de Moraes, has effectively installed the military as the final arbiter of the election.

Under these conditions, the PT has launched a sharp turn to the right, with the aim of winning the support of even the most reactionary Bolsonaro supporters behind a third term for Lula. The party is promising big business that it will bring the kind of social "peace" and stability for profit making that Bolsonaro is disrupting with his right-wing demagoguery. The chief concern of the PT is that the general misery of the Brazilian working class, which exploded under Bolsonaro, including the mass death and suffering caused by his "herd immunity" policy towards the COVID-19 pandemic, will bring into question the whole of Brazilian capitalism.

Having as its first and foremost concern the chloroforming of public opinion as to the depth of the crisis of Brazilian capitalism, the party reaffirms day and night that "institutions are working" and Bolsonaro is isolated in his

coup preparations. The backroom maneuvers of the last two weeks, however, expose precisely the contrary.

As widely publicized by both the corporate media and PT mouthpieces like *Revista Fórum*, Lula held a meeting on September 21 with the highest ranking US official in Brazil, Douglas Koneff, whose nomination for ambassador to Brazil remains stalled in the US Senate. The central issue in the meeting was Washington's reassurance that the US will immediately and publicly acknowledge the results proclaimed by the TSE, likely confirming Lula's wide lead, on the evening of the election day. Senior PT advisers have reportedly requested the same from scores of Latin American and European ambassadors, in an attempt to dissuade the historically pro-imperialist military from siding with Bolsonaro and thus barring success for his anticipated coup attempt.

This entire operation is no more than a criminal bet. The US Southern Command had no problem taking part in Bolsonaro's fascist Independence Day marches on September 7. It sent a naval squadron to join celebrations off the coast of Rio de Janeiro in the name of not upsetting the Brazilian military, with which the Pentagon has closely collaborated for over a century. The PT is counting almost exclusively on the fact that Bolsonaro, a close ally of Trump, has more than once irritated US officials with criticism of both Biden and the US proxy war against Russia – including a sharp rebuke of US sanctions during the 77th UN General Assembly last week.

Accordingly, Lula recently bolstered his political turn towards imperialism with a largely scripted interview with the mouthpiece of Brazil's agribusiness tycoons, *Canal Rural*, also on September 21, in which he made an unprecedented denunciation of late Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez, a historic target of US imperialism, which attempted to kidnap and murder him in a failed 2002 coup.

Lula took his cue from a question about gun ownership rights, which were widely expanded by Bolsonaro, leading to a sharp increase in violence perpetrated by goons at the service of large land owners and miners against both

peasants and indigenous communities. Pressed on whether he would reverse Bolsonaro's measures, Lula affirmed that he never opposed gun ownership in the countryside and assured that the world-famous Landless Workers Movement (MST), a key element of the PT's left-wing posturing, no longer had any interest in occupying private land, and had been transformed into a successful administrator of organic production of rice and other staples. The movement, which was once portrayed internationally as a radical opponent of the concentration of land ownership and even "socialist," had "matured," Lula said. In a completely unprovoked act of red-baiting, Lula then declared he was opposed to expanded gun ownership because that was "what Hugo Chavez had done in Venezuela."

The PT's recent efforts have also included restoring alliances with Marina Silva, Lula's former environment minister who left his government to become a champion of capitalist green-washing and neoliberal reforms, as well as with Lula's former central banker Henrique Meirelles, who headed the economy ministry under Bolsonaro's predecessor, Michel Temer. Both Silva and Meirelles took part in elaborately staged ceremonies to announce their support for Lula after years of publicly opposing the PT.

After leaving the PT and Lula's government in 2008, Silva became one of the largest recipients of corporate donations in her three attempts to become president in 2010, 2014 and 2018. Briefly leading the polls in 2014 against the PT's incumbent president, Dilma Rousseff, she was bitterly denounced by the PT for advocating the formal independence of the Brazilian Central Bank. The measure was finally approved under Michel Temer, who succeeded Rousseff after her 2016 impeachment on trumped-up charges. At the time Meirelles was the minister of economy.

Financial dailies were unanimous in indicating that a slight rise in the value of the Brazilian currency, the real, vis-à-vis the US dollar on September 20, the day after the Lula-Meirelles meeting, was due to the confidence that Lula would challenge neither the draconian spending cap imposed by Meirelles in 2017 nor the independence of the Central Bank, despite his past and present public promises.

As for the support of Silva, it included compromises on regulating the carbon credit market in Brazil and curbing deforestation, thus helping to unlock a free trade agreement between Mercosur and the European Union. The deal has been decades in the making and is advertised as the largest commercial deal ever signed, but it has been blocked by numerous European national governments on the grounds that Brazil's intense and destructive farming methods would offer unfair competition to European small farming. Lula has historically opposed the deal claiming it would destroy national industry. Now, with Silva by his side, he has vowed

to conclude it in his first six months in office, thus promising another boon to big business, while the fraudulent "carbon credit" schemes do nothing to stop global warming.

There is a deep sense of historical irony in the fact that the much-advertised guarantee against a Bolsonaro dictatorship, the embrace of a possible third Lula term by US imperialism, comes as Bolsonaro himself strikes a defiant tone towards the US government, exposing the deteriorating US world standing and the international descent into national rivalries and war. One of the main sources of opposition to Bolsonaro within the ruling class, and the one most stridently voiced by the PT, has been that his one-sided alignment with US foreign policy was contrary to Brazil's business interests, especially as this year the country became the largest recipient of Chinese foreign investment.

Another big business figure previously reviled by the PT, Pedro Parente, who was named by president Temer to head the state-run oil giant Petrobras after Rousseff's ouster, declared in a September 20 event at the São Paulo Stock Exchange that "if the incoming government has a certain competence, and especially with the expected improvement in China relations if Lula wins, there is an opportunity to reclaim attractiveness" for foreign investments.

The transformation of Latin America into a battleground for the increasingly bellicose US confrontations with Russia and China only makes the PT's own backroom deals with Washington all the more reckless and criminal. The same reason for the PT's praising the expansion of economic ties with China and other countries—the weakening of the US position, especially in Latin America—also underpins Washington's need to preserve ties with the Brazilian military, whatever its short-term concerns about Bolsonaro's recklessness, as it demonstrated on September 7. At the same time, the PT's subordination of its populist appeals to its quest for the backing of the imperialist powers makes it clear that whatever the result of the October 2 vote, Brazilian workers will face a government of unprecedented austerity and attacks on living standards, all in the name of "competitiveness" and "great power politics."

The organization of a counter-offensive against the class war announced by both Bolsonaro and the PT requires a socialist and internationalist strategy. That perspective is only advanced by the International Committee of the Fourth International.



To contact the WWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wws.org/contact