

Brazil's elections yield runoff between Lula and Bolsonaro amid mounting political crisis

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The first round of Brazil's presidential elections, which took place on Sunday, have set a runoff between the country's current fascistic president Jair Bolsonaro and former president Lula da Silva of the Workers Party (PT). Lula won 48.4 percent of the vote, against 43.2 percent for Bolsonaro.

The result was a setback for the PT candidate, whom election-eve polls had shown winning a possible first-round victory with up to 51 percent. Above all, however, Bolsonaro performance exceeded expectations. Until the last moment, polls had him at between 36 percent and 38 percent of likely voters.

The coming period, until the second round of voting on October 30, will be one of intensification of the acute political crisis overshadowing the Brazilian elections.

The fascistic president, who has declared that he will accept no result other than his victory, will use the next period to promote a series of maneuvers aimed at subverting the elections and remaining in power regardless of their outcome.

Interviewed on Sunday night after the Electoral Court (TSE) announced that there will be a second round, Bolsonaro refused to answer reporters' questions as to whether he thought "there was fraud" in the vote count and whether he trusted the announced results. Instead, he stated, "I will await the assessment of the armed forces ... That is up to my defense minister."

For the first time in the history of Brazil's current civilian regime, the military conducted a parallel vote count. The defense minister and key collaborator in the president's dictatorial conspiracy, Gen. Paulo Sergio Oliveira, was invited to accompany the work in the room where the vote tallying is done, which Bolsonaro called a "secret room" and pointed to as the incubator of an electoral fraud.

Neither General Oliveira nor any other military body has so far spoken out about the first-round results. This silence, after the military arrogated to itself the role of arbiter of the vote, reveals the political instability that will mark the coming period.

On the social media of the president's far-right supporters, graphics are beginning to appear showing a progressive drop in Bolsonaro's lead in the vote count. They insinuate that the turnaround in favor of Lula was the product of fraud. The same fraudulent argument was used by Donald Trump in his attempt to subvert the 2020 US election, which serves as a model for Bolsonaro's conspiracy in Brazil.

Lula is heading for a much tougher runoff than expected. Even if elected, he will have his inauguration challenged by the current president supported by sections of the state and the military, forcing him to make a series of deals with these right-wing elements before coming to power. But his problems do not stop there.

The PT and its allies suffered an overwhelming defeat to the extreme right in the legislative elections. While the electoral bloc consisting of the PT, the Maoist PCdoB, and the Greens elected 79 congressmen, Bolsonaro's Liberal Party elected 99 and will have the largest caucus in the House (a position held so far by the PT). More than 300 of the 513 elected deputies belong to parties on the extreme right of the Brazilian political spectrum.

These developments make even more concrete the analysis made by the Brazilian Socialist Equality Group (GSI) that a potential new PT government will have a deeply reactionary and politically unstable character from the outset.

But while analysts in the bourgeois media are quick to declare the consolidation of the "right-wing wave"

among the Brazilian population, the swing to the right of the political system provides only a grossly distorted and one-sided expression of the class conflicts maturing in Brazil.

A phenomenon growing year after year, in a country where voting is mandatory, is the high abstention rate of Brazilian voters. This year it reached over 21 percent, the highest figure in 24 years. Behind it, there is a widespread rejection of the capitalist political and economic setup that has not yet found a direct political form.

In 2018, the Latinobarómetro survey reported the widespread view among Latin Americans that their countries are ruled “by a few powerful groups for their own benefit.” This idea was shared by 90 percent of Brazilians. The survey also reported that only 6 percent of the population saw economic distribution as fair.

Since Bolsonaro’s election in 2018, when the survey was conducted, the crisis conditions faced by the working class have worsened profoundly. Tens of millions have been pushed below the poverty line, while the criminal policies adopted by the government in response to the COVID-19 pandemic have produced an official toll of 686,000 entirely preventable deaths in Brazil, second in number only to the United States.

The fact that the PT and its pseudo-left allies have proven incapable of strengthening their influence amid the crisis of the hated Bolsonaro government is indicative of their political bankruptcy and the mass hostility towards them within the working class.

Lula’s presidential campaign was fundamentally aimed at winning the support of the capitalist and traditional bourgeois political forces deeply rejected by the Brazilian masses. By allying itself with right-wing figures it had previously presented as the worst enemies of the working class, like Lula’s vice-presidential running mate Geraldo Alckmin, the PT made clear its intention to preserve a system of exploitation that has become intolerable for the masses.

The votes for Lula represented, above all, a rejection of Bolsonaro. On the other hand, the sudden strengthening of Bolsonaro, capturing votes destined for candidates presented as agent’s of Brazil’s “renewal,” expresses the consolidated rejection of the PT after the party’s 13 years of ruling in the interests of capitalism.

Regardless of which government takes power, the

workers will face policies of deepening capitalist attacks on their living standards and the advance of the fascist forces that intend to reintroduce a dictatorial regime in Brazil.

These threats cannot be confronted at the ballot box on October 30, but only by the mass struggles of the Brazilian and international working class that are on the agenda.

An important step in the conscious preparation of such an independent working class movement was taken by the Socialist Equality Group (GSI) at its event, “The Crisis of Democracy in Brazil and the Perspective of Socialist Revolution,” held on the eve of the elections.



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