

Brazilian presidential run-off unfolds under shadow of military's "parallel vote count"

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The Brazilian presidential run-off, due to take place on Sunday, October 30, is unfolding under the shadow of an unprecedented "parallel vote count" and "audit" of the country's electronic voting machines being conducted by the country's military. The armed forces command has essentially aligned itself with the false claims of ballot fraud used by fascistic President Jair Bolsonaro to justify his announced refusal to concede a likely defeat.

Bolsonaro has for four years claimed that only voting fraud in favor of his 2018 elections adversary, Fernando Haddad of the Workers Party (PT), blocked his victory in the first round. Since then, anticipating the results of the hatred generated by the sweeping attacks on workers' living standards he implemented on behalf of national and foreign capital, Bolsonaro has relentlessly attacked the Brazilian electoral system and enlisted the military in these attacks.

In the last days before the run-off, after Bolsonaro trailed former PT president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva in the first round by 6 million votes, the situation is more dangerous than ever. The military has remained silent on their "audit," while Bolsonaro repeats his claims that he will not accept the results unless the military proclaims its agreement with them, despite having no constitutional role in the matter.

More gravely, when asked last week by both the Supreme Court and the Court of auditors to release its "report," the Defense Ministry replied it would not make public any "partial" analysis before the full conclusion of its "audit," and that this would only happen after January 5, that is, after the inauguration of the next president, set for January 1.

The entire course of the closed door negotiations between all those declaring Bolsonaro a "fascist" and an existential threat to Brazilian democracy, first and foremost the Congressional opposition led by Lula and the PT, has so far succeeded only in elevating the military to the role of final arbiter of the elections, whatever the results of Sunday's run-off.

Now, while Bolsonaro claims the results of the first round are suspect and calls on his fascist supporters to lay siege to voting sites in the second round, the military effectively declares it will not recognize the election results until after the inauguration of the next government, if ever.

Such a declaration represents an ominous threat, given both

the Brazilian military's bloody history and the intractable crisis of world capitalism, which finds a particularly sharp expression in Brazil. Backed by US imperialism, Brazilian generals ousted the bourgeois-nationalist Labor Party government of João Goulart in 1964, promising "clean" elections a year later, before shutting down Congress, abolishing political parties and habeas corpus, purging the Supreme Court and killing, torturing and sending into exile thousands of oppositionists. This reign of terror would last for 21 years and serve as a breeding ground for even bloodier coups across the continent, claiming hundreds of thousands of victims.

The rapid acceptance by the Brazilian ruling class of the fascistic Bolsonaro, a former Army captain and unabashed apologist of the dictatorship's political executions, as the leading candidate and later president, signaled clearly that this history was not, after all, "past" as claimed by the PT and the corporate media. Now the military announces loud and clear that they are arrogating to themselves the right to rule on the legitimacy of civil authorities, which could rapidly evolve into a renewed dictatorship.

As the recent developments clearly expose, such dangers cannot be fought by a vote for the bourgeois opposition to Bolsonaro, that is, Lula and the PT. The main goal of the opposition, which has sworn their fealty to Brazilian capitalism in countless meetings with big business and foreign emissaries, is to chloroform public opinion in the face of the crisis engulfing Brazilian and international capitalism which drives the growth of fascist forces internationally.

The opposition's goal is to provide a lifeline to the moribund Brazilian bourgeois-democratic regime, in order to prevent an assault from below, effectively paving the way for a redoubled assault by the right wing.

Under these conditions, the military's refusal to rule out election fraud, providing Bolsonaro with key support for his fascistic calls to overturn the results, is being completely ignored by the opposition. Hours before a public rally in the historic Catholic University Theater in São Paulo on Monday, gathering dozens of intellectuals and artists, Lula declared that he believes Bolsonaro will call him and concede defeat on Sunday night.

Lula reacted similarly after news on Wednesday night that

Bolsonaro had made a hasty return from the campaign trail to the capital, Brasília, to meet with the military chiefs before announcing he would challenge the Superior Electoral Court (TSE) for allowing radio stations to suppress his legal advertisement schedules. Bolsonaro's announcement was yet another step in his carefully developed coup plans, but Lula dismissed it as a sign that the president is "psychologically broken."

Such declarations by the foremost leader of the self-proclaimed Brazilian left and "anti-fascist" opposition are politically criminal. In the face of the plans for a coup that are underway, the PT's only argument is that it should be returned to power as the best means to contain and disrupt the working class opposition to a renewed dictatorship with the use of its allied union apparatus and pseudo-left identity politics.

With the military placing a sword over the head of the next administration, one can only expect that, if elected, the PT will move further to the right, deepening the turn to religious, militaristic and law-and-order reaction that has been the hallmark of the run-off election.

This turn started with Lula's pious declaration of ultra-right "pro-life," anti-abortion convictions, and deepened with his calls for billionaires and businessmen to declare their open support for the PT as the best alternative for improving Brazil's relations with world imperialism. What followed were promises to evangelical churches supporting Bolsonaro that they will hold sway over social policies in a new PT government, as announced by Lula in a "Letter to the Evangelicals" of October 19.

Now the PT is fully focused on presenting itself as the last line of defense of the police apparatus. It has seized on a standoff last Sunday between Bolsonaro's fascist supporter Roberto Jefferson and the Federal Police, in which Jefferson fired 50 rounds from an assault rifle and hurled three stun grenades against a squad poised to arrest him outside of his home in the countryside of Rio de Janeiro.

Jefferson was the first of the ultra-right elements—such as Bolsonaro himself—to break from the PT's ruling coalition after Lula was elected for the first time in 2002. Jefferson then, as now, led the corrupt Brazilian Labor Party (PTB), and denounced the PT government for paying monthly stipends in exchange for votes in the Brazilian House, including for the approval of its hated pensions reform. He was sentenced to seven years in prison in 2012 for taking part in the scheme himself, leaving prison 15 months later. He later steadily steered the PTB towards fascistic forces, becoming a Bolsonaro loyalist and sponsoring, in July 2021, the mass entry into the party of members of the traditional Brazilian fascist movement, the Integralistas.

He was arrested soon after on the orders of Supreme Court Justice Alexandre de Moraes, who now leads the Electoral Court, as a threat to the state, under the sealed so-called fake news inquiry. Placed under house arrest due to poor health, he

repeatedly violated the sentence's terms, including by keeping the arms cache used to repel federal officers.

Jefferson fully embodied Bolsonaro's coup strategy, going on social media, in violation of judicial orders, to complain about the anti-"fake news" measures of the Electoral Court, which days before had ordered the withdrawal of hundreds of pro-Bolsonaro videos and news pieces from social media, and forbidden the far-right Jovem Pan radio from reproducing them. Knowing his provocation would bring a renewed arrest warrant, Jefferson started broadcasting the arrival of the police and later exposed a pool of blood from one officer hit in the head by fragments of a stun grenade. As a result, by the time police reinforcements arrived and were finally able to seize him, his house was surrounded by Bolsonaro loyalists.

Bolsonaro then dispatched his Justice Minister, Anderson Torres, who negotiated Jefferson's surrender by phone from the nearby city of Juiz de Fora. While Bolsonaro later condemned Jefferson as an "outlaw" to be punished, the protection offered to him with the use of the Justice Ministry sends a clear message to the president's fascist supporters who have been summoned to seize voting sites on Sunday.

Predictably, the PT's reaction was to show solidarity with the police and double down on the lie that Bolsonaro is the sole source of fascist violence in the country, with Lula declaring that "this never happened in Brazilian politics," as if the dictatorship the PT was born opposing had never existed.

Workers must be warned that, should Lula and the PT be returned to power on Sunday, the terms of their inauguration and future government will be dictated by the far-right and the military. They will use a PT administration as cover for not only imposing harsh austerity and far-reaching attacks on democratic rights, but also to rearm themselves for a future seizure of power.

While its success is far from inevitable, it can only be countered by forging a new leadership in the Brazilian working class based upon the struggle to put an end to the source of poverty, dictatorship and war—international capitalism. This means building a Brazilian section of the International Committee of the Fourth International.



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