

The Workers Party's electoral victory over Bolsonaro and the struggle confronting the Brazilian working class

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Just one week after the electoral victory of former president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and the Workers' Party (PT) over Brazil's fascistic President Jair Bolsonaro, by the narrowest margin in the country's history, the PT and the other representatives of the ruling class are repeating a mantra that all the dangers invoked as the pretext for forming a self-proclaimed "democratic" and even "anti-fascist" broad front led by the PT have suddenly dissipated.

Since the announcement of the results by the Electoral Court (TSE), the PT has dismissed as meaningless Bolsonaro's failure to recognize Lula's victory. Thus far, the incumbent president has refrained from open accusations of vote-counting fraud and authorized the start of transition talks with the team appointed by the president-elect, led by the vice president-elect, Geraldo Alckmin.

The proclamations by the PT and the corporate media about the "end" of *Bolsonarismo* began long before any statement by the fascistic president – who made his first public statement, thanking his supporters without conceding defeat only 45 hours after the results were announced. Meanwhile agribusiness moguls who support him ordered hundreds of roadblocks throughout the country in an attempt to provoke an intervention of the Armed Forces in favor of Bolsonaro.

Within hours of the TSE proclamation, even the conservative newspaper *Estado de S. Paulo* proclaimed in a triumphant editorial that "Brazil is no longer a pariah" internationally, reflecting one of the biggest concerns of the PT and the bourgeoisie as a whole with the Bolsonaro government, which they saw as an impediment to Brazilian capitalism's global interests.

This was followed by columnists rushing to assure their readers that the PT's crushing defeat by Bolsonaro's right-wing backers in the Congressional elections just a month ago would be irrelevant, since Brazil's corrupt parties would prefer political horse-trading with the new president to supporting Bolsonaro's coup conspiracies.

The delusional narrative about the defeat of *Bolsonarismo* in Brazil inevitably reached the São Paulo Stock Exchange, which saw a rapid appreciation since opening last Monday. The move was first and foremost a sign of confidence that the PT's anemic reform promises will be jettisoned by the new government in the name of fiscal austerity and securing profit interests. But it also expressed confidence in the ability of the PT and other sectors of the bourgeoisie to bury the broad perception of the population about the existential crisis of Brazilian capitalism, of which the fascistic politics of Bolsonaro are only the most acute expression.

Nothing could be further from reality. Bolsonaro has not recognized the elected government, insisting to his supporters that he will do "whatever is necessary" to prevent Lula from ruling. Vice President Hamilton Mourão says that "the mistake" of the far right was to allow Lula to run in the first place, declaring the new government illegitimate. The head of the

country's intelligence agency, Gen. Augusto Heleno, lamented publicly that Lula is not sick, as the *bolsonaristas* claim, revealing that his agency is spying on the health condition of the president-elect. Deriding the president-elect as a "drunk," he proclaimed that Brazil could never have a "better future" in Lula's hands.

Moreover, the recent experience of the January 6, 2021 coup attempt in Washington by former President Donald Trump shows that the beginning of the transition does not mean an end to the threat from the extreme right. In the US, Trump acted until the last minute to prevent the inauguration of president-elect Joe Biden, even as he fulfilled his "formal duty" to allow transition talks. As it was later revealed, he had support from powerful factions of the military apparatus, which withheld protection of the US Congress from the fascistic hordes, as they made their political calculations about the possibility of Trump's triumph.

In Brazil, it is no secret that Bolsonaro is following Trump's script. His son Eduardo was a close observer of the January 6 events, taking part in meetings of Trump's inner circle in Washington as the coup attempt was unfolding.

If anything differs from the immediate circumstances of the attempted coup in the US, it is that Bolsonaro has even more direct support within the state and especially its repressive apparatus. The armed forces have aligned themselves for months with the president in questioning the electronic ballot boxes by organizing a "parallel count" of the vote. On the day of the run-off, the Federal Highway Police were mobilized to hinder the transit of voters in states that are electoral strongholds for the PT. In the days that followed, police officers were recorded in videos from across the country providing support for roadblocks and even saluting pro-coup protesters.

Last Friday, a CNN report exposed the state of extreme tension within Brazil's state institutions, claiming that at least one of the branches of the armed forces had expressed support for Bolsonaro if he decided to challenge the TSE over the results, but that the move had been barred by the Army's opposition. The statements of anonymous "military sources" to CNN indicate obvious threats in the future: a coup was discussed, and not endorsed for now, but the armed forces chiefs continue to reserve the right to decide the fate of civil authorities.

As the spontaneous actions by workers who broke up coup barricades has shown, there is broad opposition within the Brazilian working class to pro-Bolsonaro protests and coup-mongering. It is the fear of this independent movement that explains both the barrage of statements by the political establishment and the press assuring that "everything is fine" and the swift action of governors allied to Bolsonaro, who sent riot troops to clear roads blocked by the coup plotters. As the WSWs has explained, the PT, like the Democratic Party in the US, fears the independent mobilization of the working class, which will inevitably challenge the

whole of rotten capitalism, far more than the threat of fascism and dictatorship.

Under these conditions, the PT's alliance with the most right-wing elements that were part of Bolsonaro's ruling coalition and its enthusiasm for the violent employment of the repressive apparatus against the pro-coup blockades becomes one additional element of political instability. Unable to appeal to workers for action against the far right, and hostile even to any of its internal factions or "social movements" doing so, the PT is organizing the transition of government in such a way as to become increasingly hostage to the far right, the police, and the Army.

A new Lula government, to the extent that it is able to take office, is born with a sword over its head. It will inevitably follow in the footsteps of the other so-called new "pink tide" governments across the continent, which are presiding over an unprecedented growth in social inequality and a massive strengthening of the repressive state apparatus.

To appease the far right in Chile, recently elected President Gabriel Boric extended the country's brutal anti-indigenous militarization of the south, while praising US imperialism and promoting "solidarity" with the neo-Nazi infested-government of Ukraine. Colombia's President Gustavo Petro sent troops against striking teachers within a mere 10 days of taking office in August, later receiving US Secretary of State Antony Blinken to reaffirm his country's status as a "major non-NATO ally" and decades-long imperialist beachhead on the continent.

In Bolivia, the government of Luis Arce is cornered by the Santa Cruz oligarchy, which is now forcing the government to ban food exports to avoid shortages. In Argentina, Peronism presides over skyrocketing poverty due to 100 percent annual inflation, which has not stopped the extreme right from attempting to assassinate Vice President Cristina Kirchner. Finally, the president of Peru, Pedro Castillo, at this moment relies almost exclusively on the armed forces in the face of the virulent opposition of the extreme right in parliament and the abandonment of his government by the working class, from which he hides by fortifying the presidential palace.

Brazil's Workers Party, which strives day and night to assure that it will form an administration free from the party's control and dominated by the old right that it once claimed to fight – starting with Lula's old electoral adversary and now vice-president-elect Geraldo Alckmin – will inevitably pursue a similar course.

In Brazil, as internationally, the resurgence of the extreme right has its origins in the unprecedented deepening of the fundamental contradictions of capitalism. As a political phenomenon, it was generated fundamentally by the actions of the official parties, often led by the "left." These parties long ago abandoned any promise of social reform and promoted social devastation and the deepening of inequality on a global scale to levels not seen since before the First World War. In the imperialist countries, they promoted an escalation of war that devastated entire countries, which was matched domestically by a massive strengthening of the apparatus of repression and internal surveillance.

The first decades of the 21st century saw the re-emergence of all the rotteness and filth of the last century, with fascist tendencies as their sharpest political expression. The recourse of the international bourgeoisie to extreme right-wing policies is based on its incapacity to offer any progressive solution to these contradictions, resorting instead to the violent suppression of working class opposition.

The PT was the main promoter of the normalization of the Brazilian far right. Bolsonaro was part of the PT's governing coalition for nearly a decade, while Mourão was given a free rein by former PT President Dilma Rousseff after he coordinated an official tribute to an infamous torturer in the country's 1964-1985 US-backed dictatorship. General Heleno, who preaches the death of Lula, commanded the criminal UN intervention in Haiti, which the Lula government enthusiastically joined.

But more fundamentally, the far right has exploited the social

devastation produced by the catastrophic end of the PT's "nationalist" and protectionist policies in the years 2015-2016, as well as the political disorientation produced by decades of suppression of the class struggle by the party.

The nationalist illusions promoted by the PT ran counter to the entire historical experience of the 20th century. Synthesized by Marxism in Leon Trotsky's Theory of Permanent Revolution, this history demonstrated that in countries of a belated capitalist development like Brazil, the resolution of the minimal democratic tasks that in previous centuries had been achieved by the revolutionary bourgeoisie would depend on the seizure of power by the working class and the initiation of socialist measures.

Moreover, these nationalist illusions rested on the brief period of reforms based on the national state that had followed the catastrophe of World War II. These reforms were fundamentally based on the temporary stabilization of capitalism enabled by Stalinism's suppression of the socialist revolution in postwar Europe and the hegemonic role of the United States as an imperialist power.

As predicted by the Fourth International, such conditions would soon give way to a renewed capitalist crisis in which the bourgeoisie would seek to reverse all concessions given to the workers, engaging in a new race for the redivision of the world, which is now exposed in the drive toward world war.

At the center of the promotion of national-reformist illusions, even more than the union bureaucracy around Lula and the heirs to Stalinism, was a range of revisionist currents led by renegades who had broken from the Fourth International in previous decades, headed by the likes of the Argentine Nahuel Moreno and the French Pierre Lambert. Such currents, now grouped in parties like the PSTU and PSOL, argued amidst the pre-revolutionary crisis that led to the fall of the 1964-1985 dictatorship that a party like the PT, based on the trade unions and hostile to Marxism, could be a vehicle for socialism.

Throughout the two decades from its formation to its assuming of the presidency, the PT, relying on the "theoretical" justifications provided the revisionists, promised the Brazilian working class that it could build a welfare state and even socialism exclusively through the electoral path, and above all without touching the structure of the bourgeois state. Even the apparently radical "social movements" linked to the PT, like the Landless Rural Workers Movement (MST), have always operated within the narrow limits of the sacrosanct "1988 Constitution" that replaced the dictatorship's laws, seeking exclusively to apply pressure on the bourgeois state to implement one or another stillborn law about limits to the absolute reign of capitalist profit interests.

As was entirely predictable, after the PT's assumption of power nationally, the second decade of the 21st century saw the collapse of the ephemeral conditions of the commodities boom that allowed the first Lula government to sponsor minimal poverty relief programs.

Now returned to power, the PT's main concern is to prevent the working class from waging any independent struggle against the threat of dictatorship. The current unprecedented situation reveals that these contradictions have reached a turning point. Despite the propaganda bombardment about the "strength of Brazil's institutions," tens of millions of workers realize that the country is on the brink of civil war and facing an intractable world capitalist crisis.

The Brazilian working class is at a crossroads. If allowed to govern, Lula will lead a regime of acute instability and will be held hostage by the far-right, which will be waiting for a new opportunity to strike. But the current crisis is the source not only of the growth of the extreme right. It poses, above all, the necessity and possibility of overthrowing capitalism through the international socialist revolution.

For this possibility to be realized, the central task of the working class is a decisive and conscious break with the PT and its political satellites in the pseudo-left and the unions, those who bear the principal responsibility for

the political path that has led to the current impasse.

This means building a socialist and internationalist leadership that rejects and opposes all the false claims of nationalist solutions promoted by the PT and all capitalist governments. This leadership must be built as a Brazilian section of the World Party of Socialist Revolution, the International Committee of the Fourth International.



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