

# Jacobin's lionization of Lula: A pseudo-left cover for war and reaction

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The eruption of the global capitalist crisis, manifested in escalating war and mounting economic shocks, are exposing the political bankruptcy of the pseudo-left organizations, representatives of privileged sections of the middle class inseparably tied to capitalism and its national states.

*Jacobin* magazine is highly representative of the political response of these upper middle class layers to this breakdown of capitalism and the drive toward world war.

Backed by the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), a pseudo-left faction of the Democratic Party, *Jacobin* has sought over the last decade to project itself as an official ideological organ of the pseudo-left. Recently, it has invested heavily in expanding its influence over Latin America, inaugurating in 2019 a regional edition in Spanish and a Brazilian edition in Portuguese.

All the forces that *Jacobin* has promoted as examples of the “renewal of socialism” in the 21st century have exposed themselves as instruments of capitalist reaction, starting with the DSA itself. The DSA members in the US Congress are voting together with their fellow representatives of American imperialism to expand the war against Russia in Ukraine, and, domestically, to suppress the growing struggles of the working class.

In Latin America, over the last two years, political parties and figures linked to the bourgeois nationalist “Pink Tide” have returned to power in a number of countries wracked by the COVID-19 pandemic, growing social inequality and persistent economic stagnation. This process has been presented by *Jacobin* as “a reminder that socialist politics continue to offer an alternative to a system in crisis.”

The truth, however, is that the increasingly less “pink” representatives of the Latin American bourgeoisie have merely continued the attacks of the previous far-right governments against the working class and oriented their countries more and more openly to European and US imperialism.

A critical case was the brief administration of Peru's Pedro Castillo, whose inauguration in July 2021 was portrayed by *Jacobin* as the sign of “a new Pink Tide underway.” The brutal pro-capitalist policies implemented by Castillo in his very first months in office were criminally covered-up by the pseudo-left magazine, which fraudulently blamed his right-wing shift on backward “popular mentality.”

After the catastrophic end of that experience with the parliamentary coup of December 2022, *Jacobin* failed to make any assessment of its support for a government that paved the way to the strengthening of fascist military and political forces in Peru and the illegitimate and murderous regime of Dina Boluarte.

The latest fraud promoted by *Jacobin* in Latin America is that the return of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva of the Workers Party (PT) to power in Brazil represents “a huge win for the global left.” It can only make this claim by hiding the record of attacks against the working class carried by the PT during its 13 years in office, as well as the openly right-wing character of Lula's presidential campaign.

The first and highly anticipated visit of the new Brazilian president to the United States, on February 10, has laid bare the completely reactionary

political project of the PT and its pseudo-left backers.

## *Jacobin* falsifies Lula's pro-imperialist agenda in the US

In its report on Lula's trip to Washington, *Jacobin* concealed the speeches and agreements made by the Brazilian leader with Democratic President Joe Biden, and sought to present his tour as a left-wing mission to America.

Brief meetings held by Lula with the pseudo-left Democratic parliamentarians Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, a DSA member, were interpreted in the *Jacobin* article “Lula Knows Exactly Who His Political Allies Are” as the most significant event of his whole trip. Never mind that, unlike the meeting with Biden, these encounters boiled down to photo-ops.

The fact that the PT leader, according to reports obtained by the magazine, asked to meet Sanders and Ocasio-Cortez was presented by *Jacobin* as a sign of “Lula's support and ideological affinity with the pair.” By the corrupted standards of the pseudo-left, this gesture is the political equivalent of beatification by the pope himself.

*Jacobin* wrote: “Lula is as close as any current world leader to being an icon on the international left. While he has detractors on the Brazilian left and elsewhere, he is overwhelmingly seen as a model of working-class organizing and governance.” On this basis, they conclude:

...[I]t's telling that Lula flagged Sanders and AOC – who detractors insist are Democratic lackeys and purveyors of a thin-gruel electoralism hostile to genuine working-class politics—as tribunes of the Left in the United States. This gesture is of a piece with Lula's long-standing insistence that electoral politics are a crucial vehicle for social progress—and that building political power to deliver substantive improvements to poor and working-class people is more important than ideological purity plays.”

This is a tautological line of argumentation: Lula is the “icon of the international left” because he is “overwhelmingly seen” this way. Ocasio-Cortez and Sanders are the “tribunes of the Left in the United States” because they are so seen by Lula.

We will return later to those presented as the “detractors” of Lula, Sanders, and Ocasio-Cortez, which are the fundamental target of this article and of the attacks of the DSA and the pseudo-left in general.

For now, we should point out how remarkable it is that *Jacobin* openly acknowledges that its political representatives are seen as “Democratic lackeys and purveyors of a thin-gruel electoralism hostile to genuine

working-class politics.” Unable to refute this charge, it is content to indicate that Lula is not bothered by it.

But promoting Sanders and Ocasio-Cortez, as well as the AFL-CIO bureaucrats with whom Lula also met, was not the focus of Lula’s trip to Washington. Those meetings merely served to provide “left” window-dressing for the PT’s real goals of developing strategic relations with US imperialism.

Under the banner of deepening Brazil’s political and economic integration with the United States and “defending democracy” in both countries, the meeting between Lula and Biden marked the deepening subordination of the Brazilian government to Washington’s incendiary foreign policy.

Having declared that his purpose in the US was to “reposition Brazil in the new world geopolitics,” Lula agreed to sign a joint statement with the Biden administration, which is in a de facto war with Russia, condemning Moscow for the “violation of Ukraine’s territorial integrity.”

The demagogic promotion by both presidents of their “alliance for democracy” had the purpose, first of all, of covering up the mortal crisis of the democratic political system both in Brazil and the United States.

According to this fraudulent narrative, the eruption of fascism in American and Brazilian politics—marked by the invasion of Washington’s Capitol on January 6, 2021, and the more recent invasion of government headquarters in Brasilia on January 8, 2023—was a threat overcome by their “strong institutions” of state.

In reality, the coup attempts conducted in both countries by their respective former presidents, Donald Trump and Jair Bolsonaro, are acute manifestations of an ongoing process of dissolution of democratic forms of rule driven by the world capitalist crisis. In Brazil and the US, fascist forces are growing within the state apparatus, while both the Democrats and the PT seek to win them over on the basis of the common interests of the ruling class.

The “defense of democracy,” US imperialism’s habitual and hypocritical justification for its every war and criminal intervention, also serves as the pretext for Lula to accommodate his government to Washington’s aggressive global agenda.

The joint statement of the US and Brazilian governments announced: “As leaders of the two largest democracies in the Americas, President Biden and President Lula pledged to work together to strengthen democratic institutions and welcomed the second Summit for Democracy to be held in March 2023.”

The Summit for Democracy, now embraced by Lula, is nothing but a vulgar facade for US imperialism’s provocations against Russia and China. Its [first edition](#), held in December 2021, was dedicated to blaming the subversion of democracy in the US and other countries on “outside pressure from autocrats” — a codeword for Beijing and Moscow. Exposing the utter fraud of his initiative, Biden invited notoriously anti-democratic and fascist figures such as the former Philippines president, Rodrigo Duterte; Washington’s puppet in Venezuela, Juan Guaidó; and Jair Bolsonaro himself.

### **Lula’s shift on the war in Ukraine**

In his first two months in office, Lula has made a significant turn toward accommodating his government to the interests of European and American imperialism.

Less than a year ago, when he was still a candidate, the PT leader resisted Washington’s fraudulent narrative that the invasion of Ukraine was an “unprovoked” attack by Russia. In a major interview with *Time* in May 2022, Lula stated: “Putin shouldn’t have invaded Ukraine. But it’s

not just Putin who is guilty. The U.S. and the E.U. are also guilty.”

When German Chancellor Olaf Scholz visited Brazil in late January of this year, Lula took an unprecedented step by signing a joint statement with the German government condemning “emphatically the violation of Ukraine’s territorial integrity by Russia.”

But, on the same occasion, Lula embarrassed the German leader, who was preparing to send tanks to Ukraine, by publicly refusing his request for Brazil to supply ammunition. Making Scholz grimace, he also proposed the creation of a “Peace Club” to encourage the end of the war that would include China.

The positions adopted by Lula two weeks later in Washington demonstrate that his proposals for world peace are not merely bankrupt; they provide a cynical cover for the main perpetrators of war.

After his talks with Biden, for whom “peace” is synonymous with Putin’s overthrow and the carve-up of Russia’s territories and natural resources, Lula came to the conclusion that the “commander-in-chief” of the US Armed Forces is the perfect leader for his “Peace Club.” Returning to Brazil, he tweeted, “We need to start a group of countries that organize for peace.... I think Biden has the clarity that the war has to stop.”

The corollary of the PT government’s embrace of American imperialism in Washington was its decision to support the latest UN resolution condemning Russia, which broke Brazil’s pattern of abstaining in previous similar votes. The resolution, which calls for Russia’s retreat to pre-2014 positions and for Putin to be held accountable “for the most serious crimes under international law,” sets the stage for the escalation of the war promoted by the imperialist powers on its one-year anniversary.

More than a subjective political zigzag, Lula’s changing position on the war in Ukraine is an expression of shifts within the Brazilian ruling class which the PT represents.

While Brazil’s strong economic ties to China and Russia have inspired its national bourgeoisie to seek neutrality in the conflicts instigated by the US and the European powers, there is a growing concern that this attitude could marginalize its position in a new imperialist reversion of the world.

Giving voice to those sentiments, *Folha de São Paulo* columnist and chief *Interesse Nacional* (National Interest) editor, Daniel Buarque, argued in a recent analysis that “the country’s traditional impartiality in international disputes like the invasion of Ukraine” is a major impediment to placing “Brazil at the center of major global decisions.”

### **The pseudo-left vs .the political independence of the working class**

That *Jacobin*’s depiction of Lula as the “icon of the international left” flies in the face of reality is no mere political misunderstanding.

The DSA’s international relations are an extension of its national political orientation, aimed at protecting American imperialism, Wall Street and its two-party political system from the challenge of the working class.

The operations of the DSA and *Jacobin* in Latin America stand in a long tradition of the US State Department’s utilization of the trade union apparatus and its supposedly “progressive” agents to assert Washington’s aims.

The anti-communist AFL-CIO union bureaucracy, which is unconditionally defended by the DSA and with which Lula also met in Washington, has historically acted as a CIA front in Brazil, under its American Institute for Free Labor Development (AIFLD) and its successor, Solidarity. The AIFLD funded a set of right-wing unions in Brazil, placed in strategic communication sectors, which helped carry out the US-backed military coup in 1964.

Within the Brazilian pseudo-left and petty bourgeois milieu of Stalinist,

Pabloite and postmodernist academics and tendencies that have vied for coverage in the pages of *Jacobin Brasil*, both the DSA's policies and the orientation of the PT to US imperialism find wide resonance. These layers have served as a conduit for imperialist pro-war propaganda and even appeals for Brazil's direct participation in the Ukraine conflict.

One of the most graphic expressions of this tendency has been the campaign by the Morenoite Unified Socialist Workers Party (PSTU), through its representatives in the trade union bureaucracy, for the massive arming of Ukraine and the development of the war industry in Brazil. Agitating for this ultra-right program, the Morenoites joined a carnival parade last week with floats representing a battery of Astros 2020 air missiles, produced by the local Avibras company, pointed at a Putin dummy.

As both the American and Brazilian pseudo-left seek in their international relations to promote their own nationalist interests, they converge above all in their common determination to block the revolutionary alliance of the working class in the US and Latin America.

The main enemy of all these middle class pro-capitalist tendencies—described by *Jacobin* as the “detractors” of both Lula and their own “thin-gruel electoralism” and hostility to the working class—is the Trotskyist movement, the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI). The ICFI and its *World Socialist Web Site* stand in irreconcilable opposition to all the nationalist agencies promoted by the pseudo-left to suppress the working class as an independent political force, from the falsely “progressive” bourgeois parties to the industrial police of the trade union bureaucracies.

The crisis which is driving capitalism toward a new world war and universal political reaction is also creating the conditions for the international socialist revolution. In the growing struggles of workers throughout the world, the International Committee fights for the development of the consciousness of the working class of its own power and independent social interests, and to mobilize it as an internationally unified force to overthrow capitalism.



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