

Latin American bourgeois nationalist, pseudo-left parties gather at São Paulo Forum in Brazil

Guilherme Ferreira
21 July 2023

Between June 29 and July 2, the 26th São Paulo Forum assembled in Brasilia. Under the theme “Regional integration to advance sovereignty,” the meeting in Brazil’s capital was attended by representatives of 170 bourgeois nationalist and pseudo-left parties from 28 Latin American countries. These included the ruling parties of Brazil (Workers Party–PT), Bolivia (Movement towards Socialism–MAS), Cuba (Communist Party of Cuba), Mexico (National Regeneration Movement–MORENA), and Venezuela (United Socialist Party of Venezuela–PSUV), along with the Chilean Communist Party and various other political formations, both in and out of government.

The meeting took place after many representatives associated with the “Pink Tide” of bourgeois nationalist governments at the beginning of the century had returned to power in recent years, such as Andrés Manuel López Obrador (MORENA) in Mexico, Peronist Alberto Fernandez in Argentina, Luis Arce (MAS) in Bolivia, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (PT) in Brazil, along with the pseudo-leftists Gabriel Boric in Chile and Gustavo Petro in Colombia.

In addition to highlighting the return to power of governments that are supposedly “concerned with the agenda of the people throughout our region,” PT president Gleisi Hoffmann said, “the central theme [of the meeting] is the effort to integrate our countries and the construction of a multipolar and democratic world order.”

The Brazilian president, Lula, gave the forum’s opening speech. Since returning to power earlier this year, he has tried to strengthen organizations dedicated to Latin American integration that were a feature of the “Pink Tide,” such as the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), whose paths were paved by the São Paulo Forum itself.

According to him, the São Paulo Forum emerged from conversations he had “with comrades from the Communist Party of Cuba and comrade Fidel Castro” to unite the left in Latin America, a good part of it organized in “very small parties trying to make the revolution,” so that they “return to dispute the existing democratic spaces in their countries.”

Lula highlighted the importance of the “Pink Tide” governments at the beginning of this century, which in addition to his own governments included those of Hugo Chávez (PSUV) in Venezuela, Evo Morales (MAS) in Bolivia and Rafael Correa in Ecuador, saying, “South America ... experienced its best moment in 500 years from 2002 to 2010, ... a period of great expansion, social conquest and political participation in our continent.”

Their anti-imperialist rhetoric, including claims by some that they would be implementing “21st century socialism,” led the Latin American and international pseudo-left to promote these governments as a new path to socialism.

In his speech, Lula himself referred to the constant attacks against the

São Paulo Forum by the likes of Brazil’s fascistic former president Jair Bolsonaro and other representatives of the Brazilian and international extreme right, saying, “they accuse us of being communists [and socialists], thinking we were offended by it.”

Contrary to this rhetoric, the governments of the first wave of the “Pink Tide” were not socialist at all. They all defended capitalist ownership and governed on behalf of the national and international bourgeoisie, while temporarily utilizing the commodity boom driven by China’s growth to implement limited social programs that failed to change Latin America’s status as the most unequal region on the planet.

A combination of widespread corruption and attacks on workers in the wake of the 2008 crash and the end of the commodities boom discredited the “Pink Tide” governments, paving the way for the right’s rise to power in the mid-2010s. Many of them, like the PT governments in Brazil, also not only left intact the militaries that had erected bloody dictatorships in the region, but actually strengthened them.

Created in 1990, the São Paulo Forum claims to have inaugurated the beginning of a new period for Latin America’s nominal left amid the advance of globalization, the implementation of the neoliberal policies of the Washington Consensus and the approaching end of the Soviet Union. The previous period would have started with the Cuban Revolution of 1959 and ended with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989.

Its goal was to bring together diverse bourgeois and petty bourgeois nationalist parties and “renew” the thought and action of the Latin American “left,” which can be summarized in the formula advanced by the PT at the time: “neither social democracy nor communism.”

From the beginning, the São Paulo Forum has positioned itself as an opponent of American imperialism, advocating Latin American unity and integration based on “sovereignty” and “self-determination,” two old concepts of bourgeois nationalism, as the means of opposing Washington’s domination. At the same time, regional integration was considered by the São Paulo Forum parties as the best way to insert Latin America into the globalized capitalist world market.

In fact, the target identified by the São Paulo Forum was not capitalism, but globalization and neoliberalism. Eliminating the need for an independent struggle of the working class, it advanced the conception that neoliberal measures could be opposed by a series of social movements in the region—trade union, indigenous, ecological, women’s, black, religious linked to liberation theology, etc.—in alliance with a faction of the bourgeoisie affected by neoliberalism, the “nationalist businessmen,” according to the final declaration of the 1991 meeting.

This alliance would be the basis of a “new development model,” in which the state would play a fundamental role in “regulating the economy,” guaranteeing the “distribution of wealth” and expanding “direct democracy,” according to the São Paulo Forum website. At the

1998 forum, this program was characterized as having—under particular Latin American conditions, marked by brutal military regimes and enormous social inequality—a revolutionary and socialist character.

In the Workers Party, this perspective was expressed in the 1990s with the elaboration of the so-called “PT socialism.” One of its main formulators was one of the founders of the party, Marco Aurélio Garcia, who was also honored at this year’s São Paulo Forum meeting.

In his article “Social Democracy and the PT” (1990), Garcia argued, “To build its project for the socialist transformation of Brazil, the PT needs to escape the Bolshevism x Social Democracy dilemma.” This, in turn, would mean stating that “political democracy is an end in itself. A strategic and permanent value.”

In another article published in 1992, “The PT and the New Order,” Garcia declared that “the Latin American left is equally unified by its concern to fuse socialism and democracy,” since “economic and social democracy have a powerful anti-capitalist component in the *specific* conditions of Latin America.”

This link between “democracy” and “socialism,” which could be mediated by the state under “*specific* conditions,” completely ignores this state’s class character. “PT socialism” considers that the “conquest of the State” through elections can lead to a new type of regime and ultimately to socialism through the encouragement of direct democracy, the formation of popular councils, participatory budgeting and the holding of referendums. The PT hailed this process as “the PT way of governing,” which was also a hallmark of Chávez’s “Bolivarian socialism” and his “democratic revolution” in Venezuela.

Garcia was also one of the international advisors of the PT presidents Lula and Dilma Rousseff, responsible for dealing with the governments of Latin America, and he was the main formulator of the PT’s “active” foreign policy. One of its main features is the strengthening of regional bodies in Latin America, such as UNASUR, CELAC and trade blocs such as MERCOSUR (Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay), as part of the building of a “multipolar world.”

Today, under conditions of enormous world tension marked by the Ukraine war, China and Russia, which together with Brazil, India and South Africa are part of the BRICS, also defend “multipolarity” as the answer to Washington’s reckless pursuit of global hegemony.

Significantly, the main document of this year’s São Paulo Forum devoted an entire section to China, welcoming the 21 countries in the region that are part of the Belt and Road Initiative. Describing China as “a factor of stability and balance” for Latin America, the document encourages its “economic and political relations particularly with CELAC,” with whom China has already held several summits. Next year it will hold another. In an implicit attack on the US, the document also states that “there is no conflict of interest between China and Latin America and the Caribbean, as the People’s Republic of China has not illegally attacked or occupied any Latin American territory, has not imposed unilateral sanctions, has not promoted coups d’état or imposed military dictatorships.”

China’s growing ties with Latin America have been watched with concern not only by the US, but also by the European Union (EU). Despite being the second largest trading partner of Brazil and of the other main countries in the region, behind China, the EU has also lost ground to the Asian country in the last decade.

In an attempt to reverse this situation, the European Union (EU) announced earlier this week an investment of 45 billion euros in 130 projects in Latin America. This happened during the summit between CELAC and the EU, the first since 2015. Among the projects are those related to the energy transition, such as renewable energy generation, green hydrogen production and lithium mining for the production of lithium batteries for electric vehicles.

The race for raw materials in Latin America that are critical for energy

transition has put China and the European Union, as well as the US, on a collision course. China has lithium extraction projects in Argentina, Bolivia and Chile, where the world’s largest reserves of this metal are located, in addition to Chinese companies having recently announced the construction of electric vehicles factories in Argentina and Brazil.

In turn, as part of his defense of a “multipolar world,” Lula believes he can benefit from rising international tensions. He assessed that the CELAC-EU summit was the “most successful” he had participated in with the Europeans. “Rarely have I seen so much political and economic interest from the countries of the European Union in Latin America,” he said, “possibly due to the dispute between the United States and China, possibly to China’s investments in Africa and Latin America, possibly to the New Silk Road, possibly the war” in Ukraine.

Latin America’s trade relations with China and, to a lesser extent, with Russia, ensured that the summit’s final declaration made no condemnation of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, saying only, “We express deep concern over the ongoing war against Ukraine” and “support all diplomatic efforts aimed at a just and sustainable peace in line with the UN Charter.”

However, any such peace was completely ruled out at the NATO meeting in Vilnius last week. As the WSWS wrote on the meeting’s final statement, it “rules out from the outset any solution to the Ukraine war at the negotiating table,” as “the US and European imperialist powers do not want compromise, they want world domination.” For Latin America, this means that it will not be spared from becoming a battleground in a new world war.

Stopping this deadly prospect, which threatens the region and the world with nuclear annihilation, will not be possible through the unity of Latin American nationalist bourgeois and pseudo-left forces represented in the São Paulo Forum. Promoted for decades by Pabloite revisionism and its variant in Latin America, Morenism, as a new road to socialism, they have proven unable to carry out a struggle against imperialism and the national bourgeoisie, paving the way for bloody defeats of the working class in the region.

The only viable perspective in this struggle is that defended by the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI): the unity of the Latin American working class with that of the US and Canada and the rest of the globe in a revolutionary struggle against the imperialist war and for the Socialist United States of the Americas as part of the struggle for international socialism.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact