

Conference in Brazil brings together renegades and charlatans to slander the Fourth International

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2 November 2023

From August 21 to 25, a seminar titled “2nd Leon Trotsky International Meeting” was held at the two main universities of São Paulo with additional online broadcasts. The event was a follow-up to a meeting held in 2019 in Cuba under the same title.

The WSWs exposed the reactionary character of the 2019 event in two articles (Cuba conference tailors Trotsky to the politics of bourgeois nationalism, A postscript on Trotsky conference in Cuba), which explained that the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) was barred from the meeting under false pretenses. The event’s main promoter, Frank García Hernández, later revealed in an interview that the event’s attendance was coordinated with the Cuban government.

The 2019 meeting in Cuba was attended by the most diverse political descendants of Pabloite revisionism, who illegitimately sought to give “Trotskyist” credentials to the adulation of Cuba’s bankrupt bourgeois nationalist regime. To guarantee that the first public discussion about Trotskyism on the island remained within these political constraints, it was essential to block the ICFI, which represents the continuity of the Fourth International founded by Leon Trotsky, from presenting its true history and program.

This year’s meeting in São Paulo is a continuation of the first in its distorting and defaming the history of Trotskyism. As in Cuba, a theoretical event in Brazil genuinely dedicated to the legacy of Trotsky would have been politically significant. The crisis of bourgeois rule in the country and across Latin America—exposed in the bankruptcy of the “Pink Tide” bourgeois nationalist governments and the reemergence of fascist politicians and military cliques who are apologists for the blood-stained dictatorships of the 1960s-1980s—pose critical historical and programmatic questions that must be answered.

One of these burning questions is: If the PT was destined to play such a reactionary historical role as a bulwark of the rotten capitalist order and in paving the way for fascism, what was the legitimacy of the claims by many of its founders, gathered in currents such as Socialist Convergence and Labor and Socialist Democracy, that they were representatives of Trotskyism? If that was false, who then were the true representatives of Trotskyism?

But the meeting bypassed such fundamental questions. Anyone searching for a coherent account of the history of Trotskyism, of how Trotsky’s ideas and the international movement he founded proved themselves in face of subsequent historical developments, would find no answers from this event.

The “2nd International Meeting” gathered prominent representatives of tendencies that many decades ago broke with Trotskyism and are openly hostile to the Fourth International and its history. Among them were Ana Cristina Carvalhaes, a leader of the Pabloite United Secretariat; the Greek Savas Michael-Matsas and the Argentine Jorge Altamira, who in 2018 led

their parties in forging an alliance with the Stalinists of the Unified Communist Party of Russia (OKP); and the American liquidationist Paul Le Blanc, today a member of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), an external faction of the US Democratic Party.

The meeting also drew representatives from virtually the entire pseudo-left milieu in Brazil, above all from the followers of the arch-Pabloite Nahuel Moreno, who played a key role in paving the way for the fascist-military coup in Argentina in 1976 by promoting the bourgeois-nationalist general Juan Perón as the rightful leader of the Argentine masses. He later promoted the formation of the Brazilian Workers Party (PT) as a means to achieve a “democratic revolution.”

In one of the main panels of the meeting, “The tasks of Trotskyism in Brazil today,” four out of five speakers were representatives of Morenoite organizations. They spent the discussion firing accusations at each other over collaborating with imperialism and fascism in their support for the US-NATO war in Ukraine, only to conclude with a unanimous call for political unity among themselves and beyond.

Besides the leading Morenoite organization in Brazil, the United Socialist Workers Party (PSTU), the main section of the International Workers League (known by the Spanish acronym LIT), the panel was also attended by the LIT’s offshoots, the Revolutionary Workers Movement (MRT), Socialist Left Movement (MES) and Resistance. The latter two are part of the PT’s ruling coalition through the Socialism and Liberty Party (PSOL), in which they operate as open tendencies.

To the extent that the participants in these panels recognized the existence of a “Trotskyist” tradition, it was of a completely derogatory character. They unanimously associated it with hopeless factionalism, political isolation, self-aggrandizement and an overly zealous preoccupation with history and political program, all to be remedied with the endless search for bourgeois and petty-bourgeois “mass leaders” to cling to in the name of “reaching the masses.”

To this effect, the most frontal assault on Trotskyism came from the official Pabloite delegate, the PSOL’s Ana Cristina Carvalhaes, who hailed the meeting as an opportunity for “Trotskyists to gather and hear each other” as opposed to “a tradition of fragmentation that comes from before the fall of the [Berlin] Wall” and “was indeed pioneered by Trotskyism.” She then proceeded to proclaim the need to “interject the fact that, added up, all the Trotskyists in the world, plus their friends and allies” are “very few, fragile and insufficient to answer” the challenges facing humanity.

Even if one overlooks the fact that all of those this Pabloite calls “Trotskyist” are nothing of the sort, this pathologically demoralized view has nothing to do with “political realism,” as Carvalhaes claims. It is an expression of the class interests of the more privileged and right-wing sections of the petty bourgeoisie, hostile to the working class and to the

socialist revolution.

But in presenting such views, which are at the heart of the Pabloite directive to liquidate Trotskyism since 1953, Carvalhaes was just summing up in the clearest terms the unanimous position of the panelists in hers and the remaining sessions, that Trotskyism and socialism are historically unviable.

Brazilian renegade Mario Pedrosa hailed as symbol of Trotskyism

The organizers of the “2nd International Meeting” brought the attack on the founding principles of the Fourth International to the center of their event through the promotion of the anti-Trotskyist theses of the Brazilian renegade Mario Pedrosa. The promoters of the meeting, led by the Revolutionary Regroupment (RR) group, baptized themselves as the “Mario Pedrosa Committee” and closed the event with an homage to Pedrosa’s legacy.

Although Pedrosa played a critical role in the establishment of the Brazilian section of the International Left Opposition and later participated in the foundational work of the Fourth International as a member of its International Executive Committee, he broke definitively with the Trotskyist movement in 1940. Over the following 40 years, which comprised three quarters of his political career, Pedrosa dedicated himself to a relentless repudiation of the Marxist ideas he had previously defended.

Pedrosa’s break with the Fourth International was precipitated by his support for the petty-bourgeois opposition in the Socialist Workers Party of the US led by Max Shachtman and James Burnham. Under the powerful class pressures generated by the advent of the Second World War, this tendency advocated a wholesale rejection of the FI’s defense of the Soviet Union and its characterization of the USSR as a degenerated workers’ state. That decision proved to be extremely consequential in Pedrosa’s political evolution.

Elaborating his definition of the USSR as a form of “state capitalism,” Pedrosa wrote in 1946: “It is precisely this monopolistic and totalitarian character of the Soviet state, and precisely this division into classes of Russian society that constitute the spring that drives its government to a territorial and economic expansion as furious as that of the young imperialists of the nineteenth century.” On this basis, he retroactively condemned the Russian Revolution and the Bolshevik Party.

Pedrosa’s politics assumed an increasingly explicit anticommunist tone, which justified his open embrace of bourgeois parties as a political alternative. From the fall of the corporatist dictatorship of Getúlio Vargas in 1945, Pedrosa and his collaborators began working with the pro-imperialist opposition, the National Democratic Union (UDN), leading to the creation of the bourgeois Brazilian Socialist Party (PSB). These reactionary efforts were carried out through a series of bankrupt and ever more demoralized political combinations.

Pedrosa’s political career culminated in the foundation of the PT in 1980, of which he was a leading intellectual promoter and the first registered member. The political framework he offered to the PT, warmly welcomed by the party’s then-unionist leader (and current Brazilian president) Lula da Silva, sums-up his efforts over the previous four decades. Pedrosa wrote that “the mass party has no vanguard, no theories, no holy book,” and that “it is what it is, it is guided by its practice, it gets it right by instinct.” Proscribing any conscious revolutionary tendency and tacitly attacking Trotskyism, he claimed that “by signing up to the PT, we leave at its door the prejudices, the inclinations, the extra tendencies that possibly moved us there.”

Far from criticizing or even clarifying Pedrosa’s evolution to the right

and repudiation of Marxism, the organizers of the “2nd International Meeting” sought to present him as a paradigm of Trotskyism in the 20th century.

Pedrosa’s legacy was addressed directly at three of the event’s sessions, “History of Trotskyism in Brazil,” “History of the Fourth International and the question of revolutionary leadership” and the closing session entirely dedicated to Pedrosa, “A tribute to Mario Pedrosa and the first Brazilian Trotskyists.”

None of these panels touched upon consequences of Pedrosa’s theory of state capitalism, which inevitably involved equating the USSR and Stalinism with fascism and attacking Marxism as “totalitarian.” On the contrary, Pedrosa’s positions were presented as genuine Marxism in opposition to the supposed political bankruptcy of the Fourth International itself.

In his presentation, “Aspects of the split between Trotsky and Mario Pedrosa and its effects on Brazilian Trotskyism,” Flo Menezes, a member of the event’s organizing committee, devoted himself entirely to defending Pedrosa’s arguments in favor of the “bureaucratic collectivism” thesis in his 1940 document “The defense of the USSR in the current war.” Omitting the fact that Pedrosa was censured by his own party, the Brazilian Socialist Revolutionary Party (PSR), and abandoned his post, Menezes attributed Pedrosa’s “expulsion” to Trotsky’s “weakness, despair and fragility” in the last year of his life.

Menezes declared that Trotsky was “desperate, isolated” and “tried at all costs to preserve the Fourth International as an attractive force” by suppressing dissent in the party. With total contempt for the Trotskyism he claimed to defend, Menezes then questioned the reason for defending its program: “Trotskyism was so small, what real chance did it have of intervening in reality? What would be the difference if the defense of the USSR was unconditional or conditional?”

Next, Menezes claims that such programmatic “rigidity” would have been the International’s doom, because it instilled in its members and sections the “fear of small dissensions,” causing “the Cuban Revolution to be labeled petty-bourgeois.” Here Menezes reveals the class roots of his forged historiography in crystal clear terms. His own attack on the historical viability of Trotskyism is rooted, like Pedrosa’s, in the fact that such programmatic rigidity prevents the unrestrained adaptation to nationalist politicians like Fidel Castro.

Ícaro Rossignoli, a member of the Revolutionary Regroupment and the Mario Pedrosa Committee, gave a presentation titled “Three debates of the Fourth International at the end of the Second World War.” In a less hysterical, but equally falsifying, fashion, his lecture sought to present the Fourth International as a poisoned tree, of which the later liquidationism of Pedrosa and other renegades was the inevitable fruit.

Rossignoli called into question the very legitimacy of founding the Fourth International by claiming that its renegades, such as Felix Morrow, Albert Goldman and Ted Grant, proved themselves more “realistic” about the prospects at the end of World War II than the leadership of the FI. He summed up their proposals as the need “to prepare for a prolonged period of stability of capitalism at the end of the war.” That this was “not foreseen” by the Trotskyists, he added, would condemn them to a “marginal” political position.

Rossignoli’s recollection of the political situation in the post-war period is imbued with reactionary conformism and pessimism on the revolutionary potential of the working class, just like the views of the renegades he admires. He hides the fact that these “realistic” theses led their proponents to fully abandon revolutionary politics and to adapt themselves to the “reality” of capitalism and the domination of the workers movement by Stalinism and other reactionary bureaucracies.

Such short-sighted predictions were nothing more than convenient shortcuts for their proponents to justify the liquidation of entire parties and groups as the only way to avoid the “marginality” mourned by the

demoralized Rossignoli. The political stabilization that they presented as a consummated fact was soon shaken by events, culminating in the wave of international revolutionary crises of 1968-75. The Pabloites and other renegades of Trotskyism, acting as fierce defenders of the crisis-ridden Stalinist and Social Democratic labor bureaucracies, played a critical role in diverting the wave of workers' struggles from overthrowing capitalism.

The political conclusion of the event was given by the representative of the PT and its theoretical arm, the Perseu Abramo Foundation, Everaldo Andrade, author of the book "Mario Pedrosa—the sensible revolution." Hiding Pedrosa's open repudiation of Marxism, Andrade presented the PT—even up to the present day—as an "experience of a workers' united front" and Pedrosa's work to found the party as a "return to his Trotskyist origins."

In other words, Andrade pretends that, through Pedrosa, the true continuation of Marxism becomes the foundation of a bourgeois party responsible for countless crimes against the Brazilian working class, not to mention its central role in the destruction of Haiti with the deployment in 2005 by the current and then-President Lula of thousands of Brazilian soldiers in a UN "peacekeeping" mission.

A sordid platform for apologies to imperialism

The rehabilitation of reactionary theses such as that of "state capitalism," which was a main focus of the event, is crucial for these tendencies being able to pose as "Trotskyists" even as they openly support the US-NATO war against Russia.

A special panel about the war in Ukraine gave a platform for the duplicitous representation of the conflict as a struggle for "self-determination" and "democracy." The PSTU representative Fábio Bosco deceitfully and superficially quoted Trotsky's defense of the legitimacy of the striving of the Ukrainian masses for national self-determination, while removing these arguments from their crucial context within the discussion of the problems of the establishment and development of the Soviet Union. Bosco omitted the fact that Trotsky spoke of the right of independence of a *socialist* Ukraine, while openly condemning the "Ukrainian cliques who express their 'nationalism' by seeking to sell the Ukrainian people to one imperialism or another in return for a promise of fictitious independence."

The PSTU spokesman identified the interests of the Ukrainian masses with the increasingly dictatorial NATO-backed Zelensky regime. "Ukraine promotes democratic rights lacking in Russia," he said, "and workers enlist to the front to defend their homeland." This is a pack of lies drawn straight from the US State Department. Ukrainians are being tossed into irrational and barbaric "human wave" attacks against fortified Russian positions exclusively by the force of conscription and martial law. Zelensky's government promotes World War II Nazi collaborators, while banning and hunting down its opponents.

The PSTU's criminal promotion of NATO and Zelensky on the international arena is coupled with the party's alignment with the most rabid nationalists in Brazil, who see the war as an opportunity for Brazilian geopolitical gains, not least in the sale of weapons such as artillery being depleted worldwide. In their union stronghold of São José dos Campos, in the state of São Paulo, the PSTU is entirely devoted to lobbying the federal government to shower the army with funds to develop Brazil's production of artillery and to fatten the profits of arms makers like Avibras. This, as ever more damning evidence emerges of military backing for former president Bolsonaro's plans to establish a dictatorship in the country.

None of these positions drew protest from the other organizations, many of whom promote the NATO offensive in their own fashion. Paul LeBlanc, a former member of a Shachtmanite offshoot, the US International Socialist Organization (ISO), argued that the "first task" in the war in Ukraine would be to defeat Putin—providing another "left" cover for NATO's aims.

The Pabloite SU's delegate, Carvalhaes, followed suit, portraying the war as "inter-imperialist." At the same session, one could also witness the 180 degree shift of Jorge Altamira's reactionary positions. Just five years after forging an alliance with the Russian Stalinists, Altamira emphatically insisted that the war should be considered "inter-imperialist," with Russia representing a new type of "military imperialism".

One of the few attempting to pose as an opponent of NATO, the Morenoite MRT representative Máira Machado, brushed off any discussion on the war and called on the PSTU and the remaining organizations to emulate in Brazil the electoral alliance between their Argentine counterparts, the Workers and Left Front-Unity (FIT-U). The FIT-U and its leading Socialist Workers Party (PTS), to which the Brazil's MRT is affiliated, consider perfectly "left-wing" and even "Trotskyist," not only supporting the US-NATO war, but also voting in Congress to condemn demonstrations in support of Palestine as antisemitic.

The position of Carvalhaes and Altamira in particular reveals that the same petty-bourgeois class pressures that historically made such currents adapt to Stalinism are now operating to enlist them as ever more direct agents of imperialism.

Conclusion

At the base of the promotion of all these historical falsifications, and the unifying thread of the event, was a deceitful silence on the International Committee of the Fourth International and its historic struggle against opportunism and liquidationism.

The political currents promoting the "2nd International Meeting" have no objective interest in the historical truth, as it confirms the fundamental predictions made by the ICFI since 1953 and exposes their reactionary adaptation to the labor bureaucracies and bourgeois nationalism, along with direct support for imperialism.

Omitting the history of the ICFI serves to promote the lie peddled by all of these tendencies: that the Fourth International, which Trotsky considered the most important political achievement of his life, was nothing more than a political abortion.

A critical role in this nefarious political operation has been played by the Revolutionary Regroupment (RR), which formed the Mario Pedrosa Committee. The RR is an offshoot of James Robertson's Spartacist League, a tendency whose political essence was the denial of the objective social and political significance of the struggles within the Fourth International.

While the Spartacists emerged in the US in opposition to the SWP's decision to rejoin the Pabloites in 1963, they were far more hostile to the ICFI. Robertson specifically attacked the ICFI's critical understanding that "the present crisis of capitalism is so sharp and deep that Trotskyist revisionism is needed to tame the workers, in a way comparable to the degeneration of the Second and Third Internationals," on the grounds that it represented "an enormous overestimation of our [i.e., the Trotskyist movement's] present significance."

It is precisely this petty-bourgeois demoralized view on the historical and political significance of Trotskyism that qualified the RR for its leading role in the revisionists' gathering in Brazil. This outlook of the

RR suits the needs of the discredited Pabloite organizations that seek to conceal their previous political crimes to better enable them to commit new ones.

A completely opposite attitude and perspective was presented by the ICFI in the recent international summer school of the Socialist Equality Party (US). As it prepares itself to give political leadership to the historical revolutionary battles of the working class that are emerging from the sharply escalating crisis of the global capitalist system, the ICFI attributes the greatest objective significance and gives the highest political priority to the study of the history of the Trotskyist movement, above all of its protracted struggle against opportunism.



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