

Brazil's pseudo-left PCO defends its support for Erdo?an in an attack on the WSWS

Socialist Equality Group (Brazil)

3 December 2023

An article on the *World Socialist Web Site* exposing the slavish support of the Workers' Cause Party (PCO) for Recep Tayyip Erdo?an's reactionary capitalist government in Turkey has provoked an angry reaction from that pseudo-left Brazilian organization.

Unable to dispute the principled exposure published by the WSWS, the PCO wrote a contemptible statement aimed at slandering the Socialist Equality Group (GSI) in Brazil and the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), which it accused of being a "pro-imperialist gringo group."

This reactionary petty-bourgeois nationalist attack was extended into a personal slander of the author of the WSWS article, Eduardo Parati, a leader of the GSI and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) in Brazil. The PCO stated that Parati, "despite being Brazilian, demonstrates that he has the mentality of a North American and, with that, a total lack of understanding of what politics is in a country like Brazil and in backward countries in general."

The PCO's attacks are aimed against the building of the Trotskyist movement in Brazil. They are designed to pollute the political environment with a chauvinist hysteria that identifies internationalist socialists as "external agents" and legitimizes the persecution of the GSI and its members. This threat is especially serious given that the PCO is openly oriented towards unity of action with fascist organizations on the basis of their common nationalist program.

The PCO's virulent response underscores the correctness of the WSWS's characterization of this organization as a petty-bourgeois nationalist tendency categorically hostile to the working class and socialism.

The ICFI defends the political independence of the working class in Turkey and Brazil

The PCO accuses the WSWS of falsifying the group's attitude towards the Erdo?an government. As explained by Parati: "[It is] in their choice of international allies that organizations like the PCO demonstrate their reactionary character. Recep Tayyip Erdo?an's recent [electoral] victory was enthusiastically celebrated by the PCO, which tried to present him as an anti-imperialist leader." Quoting this excerpt from the WSWS article, the PCO writes:

This is a falsification. Just like the claim, later on, that the PCO was trying to "divert a real struggle against imperialism to channel it into the reactionary channels of nationalism."

The fact is that we never considered that nationalism would be an alternative to imperialism. (...) The PCO's position is the

position of Marxism: bourgeois nationalism is incapable of defeating imperialism. The only social class capable of doing so is the world working class.

And further on:

This statement assumes criminal naïveté on our part. It's obvious that no one believes that the newly elected president of Turkey, a representative of its bourgeoisie, is acting out of a supposed interest in defending the people who are victims of imperialism's wars.

How did the WSWS falsify the PCO's positions on Turkey's elections? It merely cited the PCO's own statements.

On May 28, shortly after Erdo?an's re-election was announced, the PCO declared on its official Twitter account:

The PCO supports the Turkish workers in their struggle against imperialism. Brazilians are fighting too. Erdogan's victory was a defeat for imperialism. Therefore, it was a victory for all the peoples of the world.

The circulation achieved by this tweet was celebrated in a May 31 article on the party's Causa Operária website, entitled, "PCO goes viral on social media by defending anti-imperialist position." It gloated in the tweet having been viewed by "more than 290,000 people," and its receiving comments of praise from Erdo?an's supporters in Turkey. The tweet likewise received laudatory coverage by Anadolu Ajans?, Turkey's state-run news agency.

PCO readers would have serious difficulties concluding from these lines that "bourgeois nationalism is incapable of defeating imperialism" and that the "only social class capable of doing so is the world working class," since they advocate just the opposite.

Its regurgitation of formal Marxist phrases notwithstanding, the real goals of the PCO's intervention are unequivocal: to subordinate the Turkish and Brazilian working classes to the ruling classes of their respective countries, to dissolve the specific class interests of the workers into the "general interests of the nation" and to amalgamate mass opposition to imperialism with the defense of the bourgeois national state.

That intervention acquired a particularly sinister character because it was fraudulently presented to the Turkish public as the position of "Brazilian Trotskyists." This fact alarmed the Sosyalist E?itlik Grubu (Socialist Equality Group, SEG), the Turkish section of the ICFI, which

saw Trotskyism being falsely identified with support for Erdo?an.

As the legitimate representative of the international Trotskyist movement, the SEG was the only organization during the presidential elections in Turkey to wage a campaign for the political independence of the working class.

In its manifesto on the elections, the SEG strongly rejected “the claim that the masses of workers and youth have to choose between the two right-wing bourgeois alliances,” explaining: “The fight against imperialist war, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the cost of living and social inequality and authoritarian forms of rule requires the international revolutionary mobilization of the working class against capitalism on the basis of a socialist program and the taking of power.”

The WSWS article exposing the PCO is an example of the internationalist practice and political orientation of the Trotskyist movement. The decision to write that article was the product of discussion between the Socialist Equality Groups in Brazil and Turkey, initiated by a warning from the SEG to its Brazilian comrades.

On May 29, a comrade from the SEG wrote to us: “That tweet had some influence here. A lot of replies came from Turkey, basically saying: ‘Brazilian Trotskyists support Erdo?an’. So if genuine Trotskyists in Brazil expose these reactionaries, I think it would be important for Turkey, Brazil and internationally.”

This form of political work is absolutely alien to a petty-bourgeois nationalist organization like the PCO. Their international relations are on the level of bourgeois state diplomacy: once the bourgeois elections are over, the PCO salutes the “Turkish workers” for their results, and, in return, receives “messages of appreciation from Erdo?an’s supporters.”

PCO falsifies Trotsky and the Permanent Revolution

Stung by the WSWS’s exposure of its bankrupt program based on subordination to the national bourgeoisie, the PCO seeks to justify itself through a grotesque falsification of Trotsky on the anti-imperialist struggle in the oppressed countries.

After stating that it never claimed that Erdo?an “acts on the basis of a supposed interest in defending the population who are victims of imperialism’s wars,” the PCO continues:

However, it is clear that the economic interests of Turkey and other backward countries lead him to oppose the policies of the Americans and Europeans. This is because the neoliberal policy of national devastation promoted by the bankers and the financial market in their countries harms the interests of the middle bourgeoisie, which tends to support nationalist candidates like Erdo?an and Putin. The fact that the North American group doesn’t understand this demonstrates its total lack of understanding of the political situation in backward countries.

In other words, regardless of their will, the Turkish bourgeoisie and that of other semi-colonial countries are driven to confront imperialism and secure their national interests. According to the PCO, by contradicting this basic principle, “the WSWS writer, despite claiming to be a Trotskyist, takes a totally anti-Trotskyist position.” Justifying this accusation, the PCO writes:

Trotsky always argued that in the event of a conflict between a

nationalist government, whatever the characteristics of its domestic policy, and imperialism, one should always side with the nationalist government.

A famous quote in this regard is the position defended by Trotsky in the event of a conflict between the Brazilian government (at the time, under the fascist dictatorship of [Getulio] Vargas) and the “democratic” British government: “In Brazil there now reigns a semi-fascist regime that every revolutionary can only view with hatred. Let us assume, however, that on the morrow England enters into a military conflict with Brazil. I ask you on whose side of the conflict will the working class be? I will answer for myself personally—in this case I will be on the side of ‘fascist’ Brazil against ‘democratic’ Great Britain. Why? Because in the conflict between them it will not be a question of democracy or fascism. If England should be victorious, she will put another fascist in Rio de Janeiro and will place double chains on Brazil. If Brazil on the contrary should be victorious, it will give a mighty impulse to national and democratic consciousness of the country and will lead to the overthrow of the Vargas dictatorship.

This section is emblematic of the PCO’s political charlatanism. In a totally artificial manner, it conflates Trotsky’s quote, asserting the necessity to defend an oppressed country against an imperialist one in war, regardless of the character of their respective regimes, with its own petty-bourgeois nationalist maxim: “one should always side with the nationalist government,” including in bourgeois elections.

Seeking to erase Trotsky’s uncompromising defense of the complete political independence of the proletariat, the PCO removes the excerpt of his interview from any historical and political context. The hypothetical scenario of a conflict between Brazil and England was raised by the leader of the Fourth International as he specifically fought to untangle the confusion created by the Stalinist Popular Front policy, which subordinated the international working class to Moscow’s “democratic” imperialist allies.

However, Trotsky’s arguments to support semi-colonial Brazil in a war against imperialist Britain *did not imply any political support for the semi-fascist Brazilian government*, as the PCO fraudulently seeks to present it. On the contrary, such policy could only be developed in line with the *Transitional Program*, that defines the Fourth International’s attitude to a war between an imperialist and a colonial country or the USSR in the following way:

While supporting a colonial country or the USSR in the war, the proletariat *must not solidarize itself in any way with the bourgeois government* of the colonial country or the Thermidorian bureaucracy of the USSR. On the contrary, it must *maintain its complete political independence* from both. By aiding a just and progressive war, the revolutionary proletariat will win the sympathy of the workers in the colonies and the USSR and, in this way, consolidate the authority and influence of the Fourth International in these countries, and will be better able to collaborate in overthrowing the bourgeois government in the colonial country and the reactionary bureaucracy in the USSR.” [Emphasis added]

Moreover, the conception that the struggle against imperialism leads the working class and its party to the “side of the nationalist government” is, in reality, the complete opposite of the Theory of Permanent Revolution and its programmatic implications.

As he fought Stalin's catastrophic imposition of the two-stage theory of revolution in China, which subordinated the Chinese Communist Party to the Kuomintang party of the national bourgeoisie, Trotsky wrote in 1927:

It is a gross mistake to think that imperialism mechanically unites all the classes in China from the outside... The revolutionary struggle against imperialism does not weaken, but strengthens the political differentiation of the classes. Imperialism is an extremely powerful force in China's internal relations. The main source of this force is not the warships in the waters of the Yangtze Kiang—they are only auxiliary—but the economic and political link between foreign capital and the native bourgeoisie... The Chinese bourgeoisie will always have a solid backup in imperialism, which will always support it with money, goods and ammunition against the workers and peasants.

The PCO reproduces the entire reactionary essence of the Stalinist program which led to the crushing of China's revolutionary working class. However, it does it under objective historical conditions that make it even more destructive and politically criminal.

While Stalin's promotion of the Kuomintang was largely based on the argument (already refuted by the Russian Revolution) that, given the predominantly rural and peasant population of China, the working class was not yet sufficiently mature to fight for political power, the PCO seeks to impose this same reactionary program on contemporary Brazil and Turkey. That is, on countries with the largest urban concentrations in South America and in Europe and West Asia; with massive working classes that operate key sectors of global industry; and where the national bourgeoisies have a long history of counterrevolutionary collaboration with imperialism.

The WSWS article attacked by the PCO particularly emphasized the Erdo?an regime's collaboration with NATO's imperialist wars over the last decades. Parati explained that Erdo?an remains "fully capable of promoting imperialist interests" amid the escalating US-NATO war against Russia.

Responding to Parati's arguments, the PCO wrote:

In Erdo?an's case, what he charges as demonstrating that it is an imperialist government would be the declaration in favor of Sweden and Ukraine joining NATO. But the author ignores the fact that Erdo?an is simply trying to bargaining [sic] with imperialism, using this as a bargaining chip for Turkey's entry into the European Union. Going back to Vargas, what was the meaning of sending troops to World War II if not a policy of bargaining with imperialism? Vargas didn't stop being a nationalist government because of this.

The WSWS has never characterized Turkey as an "imperialist government." However, the real aim of the PCO's attack is the Marxist conception, based on the Theory of Permanent Revolution, that the Turkish and Brazilian bourgeoisies are essentially instruments of imperialism. Trotsky left no doubt that this was the character of Getúlio Vargas' "nationalist government." In a discussion with members of the Fourth International, also in 1938, he explained: "If the national bourgeoisie is obliged to give up the struggle against the foreign capitalists and to work under the direct tutelage of the foreign capitalists, then we have a semi-fascist regime, as in Brazil for example."

Having begun by justifying its defense of the Erdo?an government

based on its supposed conflict with imperialism, the PCO ends up declaring its support for bourgeois nationalism regardless of the conditions. The Turkish regime's collaboration with NATO's imperialist wars and its "bargaining" to submit the country to the imperialist yoke of the European Union are shamelessly supported by the PCO, because Erdo?an "doesn't stop being a nationalist government because of that"!

At the dead end of nationalism, the pseudo-left embraces fascism

The WSWS precisely identified the global political implications of the PCO's promotion of Erdo?an's and other bourgeois nationalist regimes. Parati wrote:

According to this view, the ongoing process behind the current war, which began in Ukraine against Russia and is headed toward China, is not a redivision of the world between imperialist powers. Groups like the PCO assume that this conflict opens the path for the so-called "rising economies" to finally break the bonds of imperialism and overcome their status as oppressed nations.

Having celebrated the Russian invasion of Ukraine with an article titled "Here's to Vladimir Putin!"—in which it declared that "Seeing someone stand up to our enemies is always encouraging. But Putin has gone much further"—the PCO was infuriated by Parati's sharp exposition.

It answered with a desperate attempt to disqualify the WSWS's arguments by turning them inside out. They claimed that by characterizing the ongoing war as "imperialist" and its aim as a "redivision of the world" Parati is "demonstrating that his analysis is that China and Russia are 'imperialist powers.'" This is nothing more than a play on words, the political method of the dishonest and the demoralized petty-bourgeois.

The section distorted by the PCO clearly refers to the NATO imperialist powers and the war they are waging against Russia and preparing against China. Although today they are waging a united offensive under the direction of Washington, the rival imperialist powers gathered in NATO are each stubbornly seeking to secure their own greater share of the spoils of war and to rebuild their military power and global influence. The resurgence of open inter-imperialist conflicts, as in the two previous world wars, is an inevitable outcome and is already developing.

The PCO's attribution of the theory of "Russian/Chinese imperialism" to the WSWS is a lie that stands in contradiction to the solid political record of the International Committee of the Fourth International. A significant part of the more than 1,000 articles published by the WSWS on the war in Ukraine has been dedicated to debunking the pseudo-left's justifications for US-NATO imperialist aims, particularly the anti-Marxist theory of "Russian imperialism."

Raising the "Russian/Chinese imperialism" theory as a political straw-man, the PCO conveniently shrugs off the task of responding to the Parati article's characterization of their own perspective on the US-NATO war. They evade criticism with rhetorical statements about having already clarified their disagreements with "analysts who claim that we are facing the emergence of a 'multipolar' world." However, this supposed alternative vision to the "multipolar world" theory is never presented in a coherent form.

The PCO's variant of "multipolarism" came out particularly clearly from the mouth of the long-time national leader of the PCO, Rui Costa Pimenta, in a discussion about "The war in Ukraine and Brazil" promoted by the pro-PT *Brasil 247* in March 2022. Pimenta explained the

international conflict in the framework of a “collapse of globalization,” pointing to its political consequences:

What I think could happen, from an immediate point of view, is that several economies end up retrenching, backing away from the policy of internationalization. Brazil, for example, has suffered horrendously from this globalization policy. They could adopt a protectionist policy as a defensive measure and this would certainly speed up the political recovery of the world working class.

This trend is present everywhere. In the United States, for example, Trump is a manifestation of this trend. ... The global far right—this Trump-type far right, not the militias we saw in Ukraine—one of their main talking points is against globalism. We've discussed it with people on the right, and they tend to identify globalism when we say imperialism. In a sense, there is a relationship, although it's not exactly the same.

The perspective laid out by the PCO leader is the absolute opposite of Marxism. The fundamental contradiction of the capitalist system, between the integrated character achieved by global economy and the crippling barriers imposed by the national states, is not to be resolved by the working class carrying out the international socialist revolution. For Pimenta only a major historical retrogression, which passes through the retraction of global economies and the reactionary policies of national capitalist elites against “internationalization,” can prompt the “political recovery of the world working class.”

The most sinister aspect of this ultra-reactionary orientation is expressed in the banality with which the leader of the PCO assumes the confluence of his objectives with those of the extreme right.

The identification made by Pimenta between the supposed “anti-imperialism” defended by his party and fascist “anti-globalism” is a critical point. In our previous article, we charged PCO with seeking to divert opposition to imperialism into the reactionary channels of nationalism. An addendum is necessary: they are seeking to divert it, more specifically, into the arms of fascism.

In the last period, the PCO established a sordid alliance with the New Resistance (NR), Brazilian followers of the Russian fascist ideologue Alexander Dugin. In classic fascist language, the NR declares that its “objective is to erect a New World and a New Homeland, through a New Order, built by a New Man” and “to forge a politically solid project consistent with what Brazil is in its essence: an Empire.”

While promoting “multipolarism” and “anti-globalism,” the New Resistance directs its attacks against the “globalist left” and what they identify as the “anarcho-Trotskyist rabble.” Like the PCO, it worships Getúlio Vargas, calling him the “Brazilian Caesar.” They specifically praise the fact that Vargas “ruled with the Integralists [the Brazilian brown shirts],” “collaborated with Nazi Germany, supported the Nationalist gang in the Spanish Civil War, correctly deported the criminal Olga Benário [the German-Brazilian Communist Party member who was gassed in a Nazi concentration camp].”

In a video widely circulated by the PCO, Pimenta promoted his party's criminal collaboration with this fascist organization: “Unlike the left who already wants to label them [the NR] as fascists or something like that, we look at them as a group that is trying to define a political position.” This is pure cynicism. The NR has a well-defined ideology, which is precisely what attracts the PCO. “Insofar as they have a nationalist position,” Pimenta continues, “I think we can have a common activity.”

The PCO's programmatic defense of a political alliance with fascism led it to react rabidly to the ICFI's exposition of the reactionary *Rage*

Against the War Machine demonstration held in Washington D.C. in February. Convened by demoralized pseudo-lefts and libertarians together with open fascists, it aimed to promote the politically criminal idea that the fascist wing of the US ruling class linked to Donald Trump is against war.

In an article attacking the US Socialist Equality Party's principled opposition to this deeply reactionary movement, the PCO declared that an anti-war movement in the United States must naturally include Trump supporters, once “Trump is an obstacle to the policy of imperialism.” This spurious position is based on a thorough rejection of the revolutionary character of the American working class, whose interests are objectively united with the workers in the backward countries, and whose role is decisive in the struggle to overthrow imperialism and world capitalism.

Behind the reactionary attacks on the Brazilian Socialist Equality Group as being a “gringo group” with an “American mentality” lies the PCO's deep hostility to the assertion of the political independence and revolutionary unity of the working class in the US, Brazil and across the world, represented by the International Committee of the Fourth International. This rabid reaction to socialist internationalism is, in turn, the most concrete manifestation of the PCO's chauvinist alliance with the New Resistance fascists.

The PCO's embrace of fascism is the deplorable result of a long political trajectory marked by national opportunism. The PCO traces its origins in the opportunist political operations of the Pabloite renegade Pierre Lambert in Latin America after his break with the ICFI and Trotskyism.

The Workers' Cause (CO) emerged from an unprincipled split with the Brazilian Internationalist Socialist Organization (OSI) linked to Lambert in 1979. Over the following decades, it remained strictly subordinate to the Workers Party (PT) and the union bureaucracy of the Central Única dos Trabalhadores (CUT), just like its former OSI partners. Even after being expelled from the PT and founding the PCO in 1995, it remained inflexibly oriented towards the PT, the CUT and the Brazilian state.

The political conditions that gave rise to the opportunist national activity of the PCO and other Pabloite organizations are now collapsing under the impact of the capitalist crisis and the advance of global war. The fascist coup plotted by former president Jair Bolsonaro and the military, and the sharp turn to the right by the Workers Party are demonstrations of the inability of the bourgeois state to hide its essence as an instrument of social counter-revolution.

The pseudo-left, with its nationalist programs, find itself at a dead end. Its political development can only give birth to monsters such as the alliance with fascism advanced by the PCO. But the same historical shift that leads to the political degeneration of Pabloism and the entire pseudo-left is producing the conditions for building Trotskyist parties affiliated to the ICFI as the political leadership of the working class in Brazil and internationally.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact