

On eve of municipal elections in São Paulo and nationwide

No to fascism, war and capitalist barbarism! Break with the PT, PSOL and the pseudo-left! Build the ICFI in Brazil!

Socialist Equality Group (Brazil)

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Sunday will see the first round of the local elections across Brazil. The dominant feature revealed by this political process is the state of ruins prevailing across the country's entire bourgeois order.

In a broader context, the Brazilian elections take place at a turning point in the global political crisis. In recent weeks, the imperialist powers have promoted a series of inflammatory actions that have significantly escalated the eruption of global warfare.

In the very midst of his appearance before the United Nations General Assembly, Israel's fascist Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu launched criminal attacks against Lebanon, ultimately targeting Iran. The deliberate purpose of these attacks, carried out in coordination with Washington, is to expand the genocidal war against the Palestinian population into a generalized war in the Middle East.

Meanwhile, the Biden administration and its European allies proceed to escalate the catastrophic US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine. They are preparing conditions to approve Kiev's use of long-range missiles to strike deep into Russian territory. Calling the Russian government's change of its protocols for the defensive use of nuclear weapons a "bluff," imperialism is normalizing the idea of a nuclear war.

These growing conflicts in different regions of the planet are more and more openly taking the form of a new Third World War. The fate of the working masses in Brazil and throughout Latin America is totally tied to the unfolding of this international process.

As the US and its NATO partners move towards a direct war against Iran in the Middle East and against Russia in Eastern Europe, while escalating provocations against China, Latin America is rapidly emerging as zone of global strategic dispute and, ultimately, into a battlefield.

Describing the increasing economic influence of its global competitors in Latin America, above all China which is a matter of war for the United States, Washington is openly proclaiming its intention to regain control of the region it has historically regarded as its own backyard.

The pursuit of these imperialist goals is fueling the resurgence of the political heirs of the old CIA-backed military dictatorships throughout Latin America. Presidents Javier Milei of Argentina, Nayib Bukele of El Salvador and former Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro mark a new type of pseudo-populist fascistic leader in the region.

At the same time—with the active collaboration of Brazilian President Lula da Silva and the other supposedly left-wing governments of the "Pink Tide"—the US is renewing channels of direct communication and coordinated operations with the Latin American military. These relations, unequivocally descended from the infamous 1970s Operation Condor, will serve as a laboratory for pro-imperialist interventions and coups d'état.

The emergence of fascism and authoritarian forms of rule is a

generalized global phenomenon. In the cockpit of world imperialism, the United States, the ruling class is moving rapidly towards dictatorship. The 2024 US presidential elections, controlled by the Wall Street capitalist oligarchy, stand as a contest between the candidate for fascist dictator, Donald Trump, and the forever war candidate, Kamala Harris.

The turn of imperialism towards nuclear war and fascism has its objective roots in the crisis of the capitalist system itself. The subordination of the 21st century globally integrated economy to the interests of individual capitalist accumulation and to the outdated bourgeois nation-state system is in direct conflict with the needs of society.

The critical problems confronting the Brazilian and global working class—the threat of war and fascism, massive social inequality, the crisis of jobs and wages, pandemics and climate change—have no answer within the confines of capitalism and the national state.

The Socialist Equality Group (GSI) calls on the Brazilian working class and youth to break with all pro-capitalist parties and fight for their independent political interests in unity with workers around the world.

The GSI has no "specific" program for the elections and rejects a pragmatic attitude towards bourgeois elections. The GSI intervenes in the electoral process in Brazil with the aim of raising the consciousness of the working class to the level of the revolutionary demands of the objective situation.

The GSI repudiates the reactionary programs and opportunistic practices cultivated by the pseudo-left parties. These organizations representing the upper middle class seek their own share of the electoral funds and positions in the state bureaucracy. They work to justify the preservation of the bankrupt bourgeois state, promoting false illusions that workers can make partial gains and confront their fundamental problems on a local scale.

In opposition to the bankrupt nationalist perspective of the heirs of Stalinism and Pabloism, the GSI fights to build a revolutionary leadership in the Brazilian working class guided by the internationalist strategy of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI).

The rise of fascism in São Paulo and the demoralized response of the pseudo-left

The degraded political spectacle of the bourgeois electoral dispute in São Paulo, a megacity of 12 million inhabitants and the country's

economic center, is an acute expression of the Brazilian and international political crisis.

These are the first elections in Brazil after the attempted fascist coup led by former President Jair Bolsonaro, which culminated in the January 8, 2023 uprising in Brasilia. The subsequent period has provided compelling evidence not only of the extent of the dictatorial conspiracy in the Brazilian state, which involved a substantial sector of the military top brass, but also that the fascist threat continues to develop.

Bolsonaro, who retains a major political influence nationally, is supporting the re-election of the current mayor of São Paulo, Ricardo Nunes, of the Brazilian Democratic Movement (MDB), in first place in the polls. Nunes' administration has been marked by attacks on social services and the expansion of the repressive apparatus. He notably used his position as mayor to defend and politically rehabilitate Bolsonaro and the promoters of the January 8 coup attempt.

Nunes' MDB was the official opposition party to the 1964-85 military regime. The MDB's political alliance with Bolsonaro in the country's largest city expresses the profound shift to the right of the entire Brazilian political establishment. In his current campaign, Nunes has taken on a more prominently fascistic political tone: He has defended militarization and religious teaching in schools, attacked COVID-19 vaccinations and declared that his mission is to crush the "seed of communism" in the city.

But Nunes is not the only and, one might say, not even the most expressive *bolsonarista* politician running for mayor in São Paulo. These elections have witnessed the rise of the until recently unknown Pablo Marçal, who is placing third in the polls. Marçal has gained notoriety on the internet as a financial "coach" mixed with his career as an evangelical pastor, who performs stunts based on the doctrine of "will power," an ideological hallmark of fascism.

Marçal's political performance deliberately emulates the examples of Trump, Milei and Bukele, to whom the Brazilian visited in El Salvador for personal advice during the electoral race. Posing as an anti-establishment figure, Marçal was able to dominate the political debates with low-brow provocations against the other candidates and virulent anti-communist tirades.

The threatening rise of fascist forces is overwhelming proof of the complete political bankruptcy of the ruling Workers Party (PT) and its pseudo-left supporters. The whole electoral campaign and the administration of current President Lula da Silva has been based on the fraudulent conception that the fight against Bolsonaro's fascism requires a "broad front" of the parties of the capitalist establishment.

This political tendency is represented in the São Paulo elections by the pseudo-left candidate Guilherme Boulos, from the Socialism and Freedom Party (PSOL), who is in second place in the polls. Boulos began his political career in the Homeless Workers' Movement (MTST) and has established himself in recent years as the PSOL's main leader. This is the second time Boulos runs for mayor of São Paulo, having been defeated in the second round in 2020.

Boulos is a representative of the international pro-imperialist pseudo-left, with close links to Chilean President Gabriel Boric, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) in the US, and Podemos/Sumar in Spain. Boulos has significant support from business sectors and from among the more affluent upper middle class layers in São Paulo, who identify with PSOL's identity politics.

Following Boulos' electoral defeat in 2020, the *World Socialist Web Site* (WSWS) stated:

Jacobin's hagiography notwithstanding, Boulos was never a socialist. During his campaign, he emphasized that his so-called "radical" politics strictly respect the limits of Brazilian bourgeois laws...

Boulos gained a prominent role in national politics with the crisis of the PT's rule. ... Boulos' phony image as a popular leader dissociated from the PT's betrayals made him the ideal representative of the petty-bourgeois pseudo-left represented by the PSOL.

The PSOL is consciously preparing to repeat in Brazil the kind of betrayals committed by Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain, with which it shares the same "left-wing populism" and hostility to socialism and the working class.

As the WSWS denounced at the time, Boulos and the PSOL were preparing an even more right-wing turn. In the current elections, Boulos has chosen the former mayor of São Paulo, Marta Suplicy, as his running mate. After running the city from 2001 to 2004 for the PT, she joined the MDB and supported the trumped-up impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff of the PT in 2016. Until the beginning of this year, Suplicy was Foreign Affairs Secretary in the Nunes administration, which she left to rejoin the PT and run alongside Boulos at Lula's request.

Four years after his first run, Boulos is running on an even more openly pro-capitalist and right-wing program. He has committed himself "fully to the fiscal balance of the city of São Paulo", promised to "double the number of personnel" of the Metropolitan Civil Guard (GCM), and announced that his administration will not hesitate to carry out reposessions of occupied properties. To formulate his repressive policy, the PSOL candidate chose a former commander of Rota, the most violent division of the Military Police, created to fight left-wing guerrilla movements against the dictatorship.

Seeking to distance the public debate from any significant political issue, Boulos focused attacks against his competitors on accusations of corruption and bad character and refused to pose any questions that would reveal fundamental differences between left and right. On the imperialist genocide in Gaza and the political crisis in Venezuela, Boulos kept quiet, cynically quipping that he was not running for mayor of Tel Aviv or Caracas.

The PSOL justifies the openly right-wing appeal of its program on the basis of the false and reactionary conception that attributes the political rise of fascism to the supposedly backward consciousness of the working masses. This retrograde theory shifts the responsibility for the betrayals committed by the pseudo-left onto the shoulders of the working class itself.

The PT held uninterrupted power for more than a decade before Lula's return to the presidency in 2022, nurturing the most promiscuous relations with bourgeois corporations and parties, and applying capitalist adjustments against the working class. Now the PT and its pseudo-left satellites want to present the rejection they face from the workers as the product of confusion, stupidity, and vulnerability to the demagogic appeals of the right.

The fact is, however, that the pseudo-left, as all the parties of the bourgeois order, offers no answer to the fundamental problems faced by the working class in São Paulo and internationally.

The multiple crises of global capitalism faced by the working class and youth in São Paulo

Like other megacities worldwide, São Paulo is marked by extreme social inequality. Life expectancy varies between 58 years in the poorest neighborhoods and 80 years in the richest ones. Millions live in precarious slum housing and face the daily problems of a rapidly deteriorating social

infrastructure.

The economic and social crisis intensified by the COVID-19 pandemic has aggravated an already desperate situation for the working class and youth in São Paulo. The allegedly low unemployment rate of 6.9 percent is accompanied by a proliferation of informal jobs and increasing exploitation. Precarious and poorly paid jobs, which take the working class in São Paulo an average of an hour and a half to get to and the same time to get home, are the norm for most workers.

Young people are experiencing an equally acute crisis, combining high unemployment, a lack of perspective for the future, and countless mental health problems. Around 20 percent of young people in São Paulo, a figure representing hundreds of thousands, neither study nor work. Those young people who are employed work in precarious jobs, such as app delivery drivers and call center operators, who, at the beginning of the pandemic, staged numerous strikes and protests against low wages and unsafe working conditions.

The election in São Paulo is taking place amid a serious environmental crisis and a new wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in Brazil and worldwide, an issue totally ignored by the São Paulo candidates. If Nunes and Marçal represent a more open form of attack on public health that combines the defense of the expansion of its privatization and the propagation of anti-scientific measures against COVID-19, Boulos' role is no less reactionary.

Following the Lula government, Boulos and the pseudo-left in general have ignored the dangers still posed by the pandemic and its consequences, especially Long COVID. The only time the Boulos' government plan refers to COVID-19, it mentions the "new urban habits of the post-pandemic" to supposedly create a "fairer and more balanced city." At no point does the need to create a "fairer and more balanced city," let alone the need to end the pandemic, mean for Boulos, the PSOL and the PT to call into question the profit system of global capitalism.

In recent weeks, in addition to the new wave of the pandemic, São Paulo and the whole of Brazil have faced the harmful consequences of global warming produced by capitalism. Brazil has been facing a historic drought, spurring criminal fires mainly in the Amazon and Pantanal regions, home to a rich diversity of Brazilian fauna and flora.

Almost half of Brazil has recorded the worst air quality in the world. The typical blue skies of winter have turned gray, forcing people to wear masks and intensifying health problems throughout Brazil. This situation is particularly worrying in São Paulo, where breathing the city's polluted air is equivalent to smoking four cigarettes daily.

Addressing these intolerable living conditions requires a socialist and internationalist program based on Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution, which has its historical continuity represented in the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI).

As the ICFI stated in its New Year's Statement, this work "does not take place in a political vacuum."

The world crisis is radicalizing tens and hundreds of millions. The chasm between the essential interests of masses and the privileges of the ruling class is becoming ever more obvious. Imperialism's normalization of war, genocide, pestilence, and fascism will provide a mighty impulse for the revolutionizing of mass consciousness and, therefore, the normalization of socialism in the political outlook of the working class.

The youth and working class in São Paulo have an enormous history of struggle, with a deep democratic and socialist tradition. In 1917, amid the effects of the First World War and inspired by the February Revolution in Russia, the city of São Paulo witnessed Brazil's first general strike, led by European immigrants who brought anarchist and socialist ideas to the country.

Over the last century, São Paulo, and the cities around it, particularly the important ABC region, became an industrial force driven by the import substitution policy, especially after the Second World War. This laid the foundations for the formation of one of the most powerful sections of the Brazilian working class.

At the end of the 1970s, the youth and working class of São Paulo and the ABC region led mass protests and strikes against the military dictatorship in Brazil. In the 1980s, São Paulo was the political center of mass demonstrations demanding an end to the dictatorship. The Workers Party and CUT, the PT-controlled trade union center, emerged in the early 1980s amid this enormous uprising.

Throughout the 2010s, protests and strikes erupted in São Paulo as part of a global wave of protests against the lowering of living standards and continued austerity measures that targeted the whole political establishment, including the Workers Party governments at the federal level and in the city of São Paulo.

In the early 2020s, different sections of São Paulo's working class—industrial workers, bus drivers, app delivery drivers and teachers—rose up to protect themselves against the threats posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

In all these situations, they clashed not only with the official representatives of bourgeois politics but also the bureaucratized unions run by the PT and the pseudo-left, which have worked to isolate and divert the struggles of the youth and the working class into the dead end of bourgeois politics. This same process manifests itself today in their support for the candidacy of the pseudo-leftist Boulos.

In recent decades, capitalist globalization has not only intensified the widespread discrediting of pro-corporate and nationalist unions but has also allowed youth and the working class to become more objectively connected to workers around the world.

The history of struggle in São Paulo and the objective development of global capitalism form a powerful basis for workers to develop rank-and-file committees independent of the unions and to link up with the workers' struggle in Brazil and internationally through the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC). The potential for internationally coordinated actions by the working class and youth, whether in the form of protests or strikes, is a factor that the IWA-RFC has been developing since 2021, made possible by capitalist globalization, particularly the technological revolution.

This potential, however, can only be fully realized on a socialist and internationalist program. This, in turn, is embodied in the historical struggle of the International Committee of the Fourth International against bourgeois nationalism, Stalinism and Pabloism, especially its Latin American variant, Morenoism. Having faced numerous attacks from the PT governments, the unions controlled by it and the pseudo-left, the Socialist Equality Group (GSI) believes that this program will find an enthusiastic response in the working class and youth of São Paulo.

In these elections in São Paulo, the GSI calls on all those who agree with this socialist and revolutionary perspective to fight against fascism, the threat of world war, and the environmental and pandemic crises to join it and help it build the ICFI.

Build a socialist leadership in the working class in São Paulo!



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact