

Brazil's municipal elections reveal chasm between capitalist political order and the working class

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The 2024 municipal elections, held in the midst of an explosive and spiraling international political crisis, have exposed the rottenness and growing political reaction gripping the bourgeois order in Brazil.

In the first nationwide electoral contests since the attempted coup by former fascist president Jair Bolsonaro, far-right political forces have grown significantly. This includes Bolsonaro's Liberal Party (PL), which registered the greatest increase in votes and elected the largest number of mayors in cities with more than 200,000 inhabitants.

At the same time, the Workers Party (PT) and its allies, such as the Socialism and Freedom Party (PSOL), have suffered a major debacle. Having returned to presidential power with the election of Lula da Silva two years ago, the PT has proved incapable of reversing a process of political decline lasting more than a decade.

These results, however, do not indicate a shift to the right by the Brazilian population as a whole. The most striking political feature of these elections was the massive rejection by the working class of the bankrupt political establishment, evidenced by a record number of abstentions and blank ballots.

None of the established parties, including those of the supposed "left," have answers to the crucial problems facing Brazilian workers, rooted in the crisis of the world capitalist system. The burning questions—such as the rising new world war, the explosion of social inequality, the crumbling of democracy, increasingly extreme and frequent climatic events, the persistent evolution of COVID-19 and the threat of other pandemics—were completely absent from the official political debate.

The chasm separating the objective concerns and interests of the working class from the established bourgeois political power is indicative of a developing revolutionary crisis.

The PT's electoral debacle

Two years after Lula's election for a third presidential term, the increase of around 30 percent in votes for its mayoral candidates in relation to the 2020 election and the winning of 252 municipalities is far from signaling a return by the PT to its position in 2012, when it elected 652 mayors, including in four capitals.

Furthermore, unlike in previous elections, when the PT elected mayors in large cities with a high concentration of workers, 90 percent of the municipalities won by the party this year were in small towns, with 50,000 voters or less.

Founded in the early 1980's in the midst of massive industrial strikes that brought down Brazil's military dictatorship, promising a new path to

socialism through bourgeois elections, the Workers Party has systematically betrayed the socialist and democratic aspirations of the Brazilian working class. By the early 2000s, the PT had established itself as the party of choice for the national and international financial elite, becoming the biggest beneficiary of major donations from large companies for its electoral campaigns.

The imposition of austerity measures against workers and its involvement in corruption scandals deeply discredited the PT and precipitated the collapse of its electoral fortunes from 2012 onwards. No longer seeing the PT as an effective tool for politically suppressing the working class, the Brazilian ruling class pushed through the fraudulent impeachment process of President Dilma Rousseff in 2016, passively assisted by the PT. Lula was then sentenced to prison for corruption.

The PT's historic crisis—the most concentrated manifestation of a crisis of Brazil's post-dictatorial political regime as whole—paved the way for Bolsonaro's rise to the presidency in 2018. In the following municipal elections, in 2020, the PT obtained the worst performance in its history.

The deepening crisis of the bourgeois order, aggravated by Bolsonaro's coup adventures and the growing social and economic contradictions since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, led the ruling class to politically rehabilitate Lula and rally around his presidential campaign in 2022.

But, while the capitalists chose Lula as a figure more capable of covering up the instability of their failing political regime and evoking memories of a more prosperous economic past, the return of the PT to the presidency did not lead to a narrowing of its schism with the working class.

The massive rejection of the PT among the working population was clearly evidenced in the country's most industrialized state, São Paulo, where its performance plummeted from 895,347 votes in 2020 to 393,714 votes this year.

Once nicknamed the "red belt", in reference to the PT's enormous electoral influence, the industrial cities around São Paulo's capital are the scene of the party's biggest defeats. Having once administered several of these cities for more than one term, the PT made it to the second round only in Diadema and Mauá this year, being elected only in the latter.

After having its worst result in an election in São Paulo's capital in 2020, when candidate Jilmar Tatto came in a distant sixth place, for the first time the PT failed to present its own candidate for mayor. Instead, it supported Guilherme Boulos of the PSOL, while being responsible for nominating his running mate, Marta Suplicy.

In Porto Alegre, capital of the southern state of Rio Grande do Sul, which was hit hard by record floods in May, the abstention rate reached almost 35 percent. There, despite all the negligence of the current mayor, Sebastião Melo (MDB), in relation to the city's flood-fighting infrastructure, he was re-elected by a wide margin against PT candidate

Maria do Rosário (62 percent to 38 percent).

The PT ruled Porto Alegre for four consecutive administrations, from 1989 to 2004. During this period, the city instituted initiatives such as the Participatory Budget which, according to the PT, were the first steps on its “road to socialism” through the bourgeois state. Porto Alegre was also chosen to host the first editions of the World Social Forum.

Boulos’ defeat in São Paulo and the exposure of the pseudo-left’s “fight against fascism”

The results obtained by the PT and PSOL in the elections were a devastating response to the bankrupt program of the pseudo-left based on the claim that the resurgence of fascism requires a “broad front” of the “democratic” parties of the bourgeois establishment. Not only does this false political narrative distort the true social origins of the encroachments against democracy, but it represents no barrier to the rise of fascism.

Under Lula’s “broad front” government, the PT and the pseudo-left have systematically promoted the military and fascistic political forces that plotted the January 8, 2023 coup d'état. This fact was explicitly demonstrated in the elections, as the PT contested almost a hundred cities in coalition with Bolsonaro’s PL party and, as a result, will jointly administer 49 municipalities where they were elected.

At the same time, by promoting the bourgeoisie’s common agenda of austerity and repression against the working class under the false flag of “unity for democracy,” the PT and the pseudo-lefts are opening up political avenues for the far right to exploit mass discontent with existing conditions.

This was evidenced in the massive rejection of the PSOL-PT campaign of Boulos in São Paulo. Boulos was defeated by current mayor Ricardo Nunes of the Brazilian Democratic Movement (MDB), a fascist figure sponsored by Bolsonaro, by 59 percent to 41 percent. The number of abstentions and blank ballots reached a record 3.6 million, significantly higher than the 3.3 million votes cast for Nunes.

Despite Boulos being heavily promoted by Lula, the votes obtained by the president in 2022 were not transferred to the PSOL candidate. While Lula received 3.7 million votes in 2022 in São Paulo, Boulos got 2.3 million votes. This is an indication of the dissatisfaction already built up under the Lula government, which has been unable to offer any prospect of improving living conditions after almost two years in power.

Boulos’ defeat has once again demonstrated the complete bankruptcy of the “left-wing populism,” which has produced only disasters for the working class internationally, such as with Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain. In his second run for mayor of São Paulo, Boulos adopted increasingly right-wing positions and received astronomical financial resources that made his campaign the most expensive in Brazil, spending R\$20 million (US\$3.5 million) more than Nunes. Despite this, the PSOL candidate did not increase his overall votes and saw his support fall dramatically in the city’s poorest peripheries.

What Boulos’ pseudo-left campaign and promises to “sweep Bolsonarism out of São Paulo” actually achieved was an even greater approximation to the fascists. In his quest for votes, Boulos accepted an invitation to participate in a live broadcast with Pablo Marçal, holding a friendly political get-together with the most openly fascist candidate in the São Paulo elections, who was defeated in the first round.

A week before the second round, Boulos launched a “Letter to the People of São Paulo,” declaring that “Our government will be one of dialogue and joint construction, without ties to any kind of sectarianism.” On the same day, he met with evangelical leaders, affirming that, “more than ideologies,” what moved him to govern São Paulo “is a question of

humanity. There are things that don’t matter if you’re left or right, it’s [a question of] humanity.”

Morenoites cover their tracks and prepare new betrayals

Four years ago, the Socialist Equality Group’s (GSI) analysis of the growing adaptation of the pseudo-left to the military and fascist forces on the rise in Brazilian politics received a hysterical response from the Morenoite Revolutionary Workers Movement (MRT), which published the *Esquerda Diário* website. The Morenoites accused the GSI and the WSWS of slander for having correctly exposed the MRT’s complicity in this process as it participated in PSOL’s electoral campaign by running its own candidates on the party’s slate.

Like the different anti-Trotskyist Pabloite tendencies that historically backed Lula and, when the PT’s betrayals got too exposed, fled the party like rats from a sinking ship to form the PSOL, the MRT Morenoites spent the last decade promoting illusions in this pseudo-left party of the upper middle class and absurdly claiming that it represented a necessary means for building a revolutionary party in Brazil.

Today, as the reactionary political essence of the PSOL comes out in full force, the MRT and other groups seeking to maintain a radical veneer (such as the Revolutionary Communist Organization—OCI, linked to Alan Woods’ Revolutionary Communist International, which disaffiliated from the PSOL a year ago) are engaged in an operation to cover their own tracks and create new political traps for the youth and workers in Brazil.

The MRT launched candidates in this year’s elections through the Unified Socialist Workers Party (PSTU), as it had already done in the 2022 national elections. It presented itself as the “Communist Caucus,” choosing as its slogan: “against the extreme right, reforms and class conciliation.” Despite recognizing the nefarious results of the policies pursued by the PT and the PSOL, the Morenoites’ electoral statements draw completely false and disorienting political conclusions.

The characterization of the policies of the PT and PSOL as “class conciliation” plays a particularly deceptive role. The clash between this terminology and reality is highlighted by a statement made by the MRT itself in its balance sheet of the elections. Recounting how the PSOL “joined the government and the Broad Front, formed a federation with a bourgeois party like Rede, took on right-wing programs and discourses,” it concludes that this “has become a party driven largely by a membership paid for by the 126 million reais Electoral Fund and by parliamentary mandates.”

What is revealed by these objective considerations about the PSOL (whose analogies in relation to the PT are obvious) is a party formed by a middle-class bureaucracy materially tied to the national bourgeoisie and its state at every level. However, when the MRT presents the policies of these parties as ones of “class conciliation,” it is implying that they are essentially working class parties but politically oriented towards the bourgeois.

This misleading characterization is not simply a theoretical error, but a definite orientation. Its aim is to imprison all left-wing opposition within the orbit of these capitalist parties and the corporatist trade unions they control, within which the Morenoites eagerly vie for positions.

Such a bankrupt Pabloite perspective is the real content of what the MRT fraudulently presents as a “position of class independence.” In their words this would boil down to “building the independent mobilization of workers by fighting in the unions for an effective plan of struggle against the attacks and in defense of our rights,” as they wrote in their statement of support for trade unionist Altino Prazeres, the PSTU candidate in São Paulo.

Like the PSTU, which called for a vote for Boulos in the second round, the MRT made clear the completely unserious character of its opposition to the PSOL and the PT, declaring at the end of the campaign: “We understand that many workers and young people will cast a vote for Boulos in the hope of defeating Nunes electorally. Although we don’t share this position, we in the MRT will be in the front ranks, as we always have been, in the fight against Nunes and Marçal and all shades of Bolsonarism.” They could also have written: “Sorry, we can’t afford to get our hands dirty this time, but we’ll soon be together in the coming union campaigns.”

Build the International Committee of the Fourth International in Brazil

Contrary to what the Morenoites preach, a political alternative for the working class will come not from an amalgam of the nationalist pseudo-left groups subordinated to the bureaucratic apparatuses of the trade unions and the bourgeois state.

A real alternative requires a fight to build a revolutionary leadership within the working class that is consciously opposed to the national bourgeoisie and its agents and guided by a genuinely internationalist and socialist program. That is the real meaning of “class independence.”

Such a revolutionary socialist perspective in response to the explosive political crisis in Brazil is advanced only by the Socialist Equality Group. In response to the Brazilian municipal elections, the GSI issued the statement, “No to fascism, war and capitalist barbarism! Break with the PT, PSOL and the pseudo-left! Build the ICFI in Brazil!”

The document warned that “the fate of Brazilian workers and youth is deeply tied to the unfolding” of “a new Third World War” and advocated “the unification of the international working class to overthrow capitalism” by “building the necessary revolutionary leadership based on the internationalist strategy of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI).”

On the eve of the second round of the Brazilian elections, the GSI held a video interview with Socialist Equality Party (US) presidential candidate Joseph Kishore. The discussion raised the deep connections and implications of the political crisis in the United States for Brazil and the ICFI’s globally coordinated political intervention.

We urge our readers in Brazil to study these perspectives and make the decision to join the GSI.



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