

# Brazil's ruling Workers Party faces crisis ahead of internal elections

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Next Sunday, July 6, Brazil's ruling Workers Party (PT) will hold its direct elections for the party's leadership positions at the municipal, state, and national levels. The PT's new national president will be responsible for overseeing the party's candidacies in next year's general elections, first and foremost the presidential one.

Brazil's current president, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, is the PT's likely candidate in next year's presidential election. In his third term as president (2003-2010 and since 2023) and the PT's fifth since the beginning of the century, Lula is carrying out a capitalist austerity program as workers face deteriorating conditions and rising inflation. Lula's popularity rating has been gradually dropping since the end of last year, including in regions and sections of the population that voted overwhelmingly for him in 2022.

This accelerating crisis has raised alarm bells within the PT. At the end of last year, the PT's debacle in the municipal elections had already provoked a wide-ranging internal discussion. Some tendencies within the party attributed the electoral defeat to a failure in broadening alliances with right-wing forces, while others claimed it was caused precisely by existing alliances with these same political forces.

There is growing apprehension within the PT that last year's debacle will repeat itself in the 2026 national elections. A feared scenario is one in which Lula fails to win re-election against a candidate supported by fascist former president Jair Bolsonaro, who is ineligible to run and is on trial for the attempted coup of January 8, 2023.

The ongoing internal election in the PT is considered by many to be the most important in the party's history. Long-standing PT leaders and social movements that orbit the party have increasingly criticized both it and the Lula government, warning that the very future of the PT is at stake in this internal dispute.

Different tactics for reversing the party's crisis have been presented in the debates taking place since the beginning of June between the four candidates for PT national president. They all support Lula's candidacy in next year's presidential election. They are all long-standing members of the party's leadership, with political careers dating back to the 1980's and to different political currents that joined in founding the PT.

The candidate supported by Lula and favorite in the contest is Edson Antonio da Silva, known as Edinho, belonging to the "Construindo um Novo Brasil" (Building a New Brazil - CNB) tendency. Both he and candidate Romênio Pereira, the PT's current international relations secretary, began their political trajectory in the ecclesial base communities of the Catholic Church. This Catholic wing, alongside the so-called "new trade unionism" and the Pabloite, Morenoite and Lambertite renegades from Trotskyism, had a leading role in the PT's creation in 1980.

Rui Falcão and Valter Pomar, the two other candidates, present themselves as the PT's "left wing," evoking socialist and anti-imperialist rhetoric. Both began their political careers, before joining the PT, in organizations that split from the Stalinist Brazilian Communist Party (PCB) before and after the 1964 military coup.

Pomar, born in 1966, was a member of the youth movement of the Maoist inspired Communist Party of Brazil (PCdoB). His grandfather, Pedro Pomar, was one of the main founders of the PCdoB, which split from the Moscow-oriented PCB in 1962 advocating peasant-based guerrilla war as its main strategy. After the disastrous outcome of the Araguaia Guerrilla led by the PCdoB in the late 1960's, Pomar was murdered alongside other party leaders by agents of the military dictatorship in 1976.

Falcão, in turn, was a student leader and member of the Vanguarda Armada Revolucionária Palmares (Armed Revolutionary Vanguard Palmares, VAR-Palmares) during the years of dictatorship.

While the PCdoB and the advocates of the armed struggle against the military dictatorship broke with the PCB, denouncing its passivity and advocating more radical methods, they never broke with the Stalinist two-stage theory of revolution. They continued to advocate that the Brazilian revolution would have a bourgeois national character, and that the national bourgeoisie constituted a progressive force in the struggle against landlords and imperialism. There are definite traces of this reactionary perspective in the left-tinted discourse of both Pomar and Falcão today.

In a defining moment in their careers within the PT, Pomar and Falcão led a split in Lula's tendency "Articulação" in 1993, amid an acute crisis in the PT following the dissolution of the USSR, the implementation of neoliberal policies in Brazil, and an increase in the PT's electoral gains. They established then the "Articulação de Esquerda", a tendency that Falcão left in 1995 and which is now led by Pomar.

The Pomar-Falcão split revolved around the PT's so-called "democratic and popular program." Its premise of "accumulating forces" for building socialism through a government that promotes structural reforms of an "anti-landowner, anti-monopoly and anti-imperialist" nature was openly repudiated by Lula's "Articulação" as it sought to appeal to the broadest sections of the bourgeoisie for the election of Lula.

Both Falcão and Pomar continue to invoke the supposedly "socialist" program of the PT's origins in party debates. Such phraseology, in fact, has never been anything but a cover for the PT's bourgeois orientation.

Different things are at stake in the internal PT elections, which have increasingly divided the party. These include the formal relationship of the party to Lula's government, whose demoralization threatens the PT's existence as a whole, and the party's attitude towards the persistent political threats posed by the fascistic right, represented by Bolsonaro and his allies. No less important in the internal disputes are the political alliances for next year's election (i.e., the horse-trading with other bourgeois parties) and the distribution of resources within the PT's massive and corrupt apparatus.

In the first internal debate, on June 2, the candidates for PT president did not fail to note the devastating state of the party today: distant from its members, undemocratic, with bitter disputes in the party leadership, and wholly focused on the elections.

Rui Falcão declared in the first debate: "We have to return to our

founding principles. Or as one of my comrades said to me: ‘I want my PT back, the PT that is led by the rank and file, the PT that is present in every territory and not every two years in the elections.’” For him, this also threatens the PT with becoming a party “that doesn’t win elections.”

Even Edinho Silva, who is considered the most right-wing candidate in this internal PT election, did not fail to declare the need to “deepen internal democracy” by “getting back to organizing at the bottom.” Otherwise, he warned, the PT “is obviously heading for a weakening,” which could have a tragic outcome: “We have several experiences in the world of parties of working-class origin, left-wing parties, which have made mistakes and, unfortunately, have decreed their own end.”

Valter Pomar has been one of the most vocal critics of various aspects of these internal elections. He has denounced candidate Silva for abusing economic power to carry out an intense electoral campaign, including trips to the party’s state and municipal headquarters throughout Brazil, with a jet owned by a rural businessman affiliated with the PT.

In a March 10 interview with TV247’s Contramola show, Pomar drew attention to a growing internal dispute within the CNB tendency itself. Pointing to the disputes over the apparatus in a party that in 2022 received over 500 million reais (around US\$ 100 million) from the state electoral fund and in 2023 raised close to 160 million reais (around US\$ 30 million), he questioned: “Are these disagreements about the number of affiliations to the PT in recent days and weeks [aimed at manipulating the internal election results]? Or is it the discussion about who will control the party treasury?”

In the latest episode of the PT’s internal crisis, earlier this week, three of the four candidates—Pereira, Falcão, and Pomar—issued a joint letter that addressed the recent series of defeats of the Lula administration in Congress, which indicate the crumbling of its legislative coalition. The letter desperately warned, “The majority of the National Congress, including the right-wing parties with ministers in the federal government, are attempting to suffocate the Lula government.”

In response, the signatories advocate “mobilizing the population,” “replacing ministers” from the right-wing parties and “cutting subsidies and exemptions that benefit the super-rich.” These measures would supposedly “change the correlation of forces” and “put Brazil’s development at the center of the agenda, held back by financial capital and the sectors focused on exporting primary products.”

The letter also implicitly attacked candidate Edinho Silva, arguing that “the PT membership must vote for candidates who advocate getting off the defensive and entering the fight.” Silva has been the figure most associated with support for the government’s austerity policies being led by Finance Minister Fernando Haddad. This feature, however, is praised as his essential quality by those supporting him as the ablest candidate to oversee the formation of a new “broad front” coalition with right-wing bourgeois parties for next year’s elections.

Summarizing what he sees at stake in the party’s internal elections, Pomar declared on the June 2nd debate that members “will essentially decide which Workers Party will exist until 2029.” He continued:

Is it going to be a party that defends socialism, or is it going to be a party that has adapted to neoliberalism? Is it a party that makes alliances to implement the program, or makes alliances that block the implementation of the program? Is it a party of social struggles, or is it a party that is a prisoner of institutionalism? Will we have a party with bodies controlled by the rank and file, or will we have bodies under the tutelage of parliamentarians?

After the PT’s 45 years of existence, the dilemmas being raised by figures like Pomar are of an entirely fraudulent character. These rhetorical

arguments have been raised time and again over the party’s history by those forces seeking to portray the consistent right-wing trajectory of the PT as accidental.

The PT emerged amid the massive struggles of the Brazilian working class that undermined the military dictatorship in the early 1980’s, and it served as a political instrument to stabilize bourgeois rule. The founding documents of the party, prepared with the assistance of renegades from Trotskyism, spoke of “democratic socialism” and the “political independence” of the working class—ideas that strongly reverberated with the aspirations of the working masses. At the same time, the PT leadership deliberately claimed it rejected any “dogma” or “finished program”—i.e., Marxism and the whole history of its theoretical development.

In a period in which Social Democracy, Stalinism and different variants of bourgeois and petty-bourgeois radicalism had been fully exposed as mortal enemies of the working class and socialism, the PT’s cult of empiricism was a conscious maneuver to divert the working class from drawing the conclusions from its historical international experience of revolutionary struggle.

The trajectory of the PT—from a mass workers’ party with a bourgeois orientation, passing through its increasingly naked domination by the state apparatus and detachment from the working class and socialist-minded youth, until its emergence as capitalism’s preferred choice to rule the country—was inscribed at its political inception.

The sharp disputes emerging within the PT are themselves expression of the explosive crisis facing the entire bourgeois regime in Brazil, whose immense political and social contradictions were largely absorbed by the PT itself.

Figures like Pomar and Falcão speak not only for themselves. They represent a whole petty-bourgeois layer that sees its comfortable financial and political existence, closely linked to the universities and trade-union bureaucracies, under threat. Their arguments and rhetorical dilemmas are reproduced in internal debates being carried out in the pseudo-left satellite parties of the PT, first of all the Socialism and Freedom Party (PSOL), which share a common class base.

The historical record unmistakably exposes the reactionary role of such pseudo-left forces in and around the PT: to provide a left cover for this bourgeois party to continue imposing capitalist attacks against the working class and block the emergence of the working class as an independent political force.

A genuine socialist alternative in Brazil depends on a sober assessment of the PT’s history and role and a conscious break with the whole PT/pseudo-left milieu. A new mass movement of the working class must be built around a socialist internationalist program and through the building of new rank-and-file organizations of struggle and a revolutionary leadership, that is, a Brazilian section of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI).



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