

Mass protests in Brazil against amnesty for Bolsonaro's fascist coup attempt

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Brazil witnessed massive nationwide demonstrations on Sunday, September 21, opposing the efforts of the political establishment to politically rehabilitate and overturn the conviction of former President Jair Bolsonaro and his military and civilian co-conspirators in the January 8, 2023 fascist coup attempt.

The protests were prompted by last week's approval of two measures in the Brazilian House of Representatives demanded by the fascist political opposition associated with Bolsonaro as part of what they call a "National Pacification Package."

On Wednesday, by a vote of 311 to 163, the House approved the expedited voting procedure for a bill to amnesty those who are convicted and who are under investigation for the January 8 coup attempt. On the same day, it approved a constitutional amendment bill dubbed the "PEC da Blindagem" ("Shielding Amendment"), which prohibits the criminal prosecution of members of parliament and party presidents without congressional authorization.

Mass opposition is being driven by the perception among broad sections of the Brazilian population that the corrupt bourgeois political system is striking a criminal compromise behind their backs to preserve the power of the forces exposed for conspiring to overthrow democracy and reimpose a military dictatorship. These sentiments were widely displayed in Sunday's protests.

In the demonstrations, which took place in virtually every major city in the country, demonstrators held signs calling the president of the House of Representatives, Hugo Motta, an "enemy of the people" and chanted: "No amnesty and no forgiveness, I want to see Bolsonaro in prison."

In São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, where the largest demonstrations occurred, more than 40,000 people took to the streets. Renowned artists had a prominent role both in the promotion of the demonstrations and giving speeches and musical performances, which was also characteristic of the historic protests against the US-backed military dictatorship (1964-1985) in Brazil.

The protest in Rio had the participation of legendary figures of Brazilian popular music, such as Chico Buarque, Caetano Veloso and Gilberto Gil, all of them imprisoned and exiled under the dictatorship and now in their eighties. As demonstrators shouted, "No Amnesty!" and "Long live democracy!" they sang the song "Cálice" (chalice, in Portuguese, which is pronounced the same as "shut up"), composed by Gil and Chico, an anthem of the struggle against the military dictatorship.

The turnout at these demonstrations exceeded the expectations of the ruling Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT), the pseudo-left

Socialism and Liberty Party (PSOL) and the unions and social movements they control, which initially called for them.

In what were considered the largest demonstrations of a left-wing character in recent years, they spontaneously attracted a crowd that far exceeded that of the September 7 Brazilian Independence Day demonstrations called by these same political forces. There, they sought to subordinate all political and social opposition to the defense of "national sovereignty" against Trump's tariffs and for the so-called "popular agenda" of the Lula administration oriented to reversing the decline in its approval rating. The agenda included an income tax exemption for those earning up to R\$5,000 per month and a reduction of working hours.

More importantly, the protests expressed widespread social, economic and political dissatisfaction, which has also fueled mass protests around the world. Recent years have also seen an increasing number of strikes, particularly by federal public workers against the Lula government's austerity policies.

Faced with this social powder keg and unable to offer any real solutions to the problems faced by the Brazilian working class, the entire Brazilian ruling class viewed Sunday's protests with concern. It fears that these protests will become the spark for a massive movement from below, outside the control of the nominal left and the unions it controls, that threatens the fragile bourgeois regime in Brazil, of which the PT is a fundamental pillar.

Against this threat, the PT is doing everything it can to prevent the growing discontent of the Brazilian population and the consequent explosion of protests and strikes from getting out of control. It is seeking to divert this movement behind calls for pressuring Congress to put its "popular agenda" on the table and forming a new bourgeois "broad front" for next year's general election.

The palace negotiations within the discredited Congress last week also widely exposed the PT, which rushed to minimize the damage and prevent popular outrage from turning against the Lula government. On Thursday, the daily *Estado de S. Paulo* reported that Lula had advocated a "light amnesty" in a meeting with allied parties, which includes the possibility of reducing sentences for those convicted of the coup attempt in exchange for a better position to negotiate its agenda in Congress.

Equally damning, 12 PT deputies (about 20 percent of the PT's total representation in the Chamber of Deputies) voted in favor of the "Shielding Amendment" on Wednesday. In various

demonstrations across Brazil, they were denounced as alleged “traitors to the PT.”

Explaining the spurious behind-the-scenes negotiations in the Chamber, Gleide Andrade, finance secretary of the PT, stated on Thursday: “The first thing we have to do is be fair to history and to the people. The 12 who voted [in favor of the Shielding Amendment] voted because they followed instructions. And halfway through, some of them, when they saw the reaction on social media, changed their minds. Those 12 are being crucified.”

She continued: “I followed everything closely, and the national president of the PT [Edinho Silva] said so. So, yes, there was an agreement. Because of the breach of this agreement, the Chamber voted for a broad and unrestricted amnesty.”

Despite this, the PT and the pseudo-left around it saw Sunday’s protests as a “turning point” for the Lula government, advancing a clear intention to channel them into bourgeois politics. The PT president himself welcomed Sunday’s protests on X, writing that “I am on the side of the Brazilian people” and that “the National Congress must focus on measures that benefit the Brazilian people.”

Similarly, PSOL leader Guilherme Boulos said at the protest in São Paulo that “today is a historic day” because “the Brazilian left has regained its leading role in the streets.” He also demanded that the president of the Chamber put Lula’s government bills on the agenda this week.

Revealing where he wants to divert the protests, Boulos said that one of the results of the “Brazilian people taking back the streets” will be “electing Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva as president of Brazil next year.” The other, according to him, is “electing the largest left-wing bloc in the Brazilian Congress. Doing the whole job, electing Lula and winning in Congress.”

With Trump’s tariffs against Brazil, the PT and PSOL are also trying to forge a bankrupt link between the “popular agendas” and the reactionary defense of nationalism. Boulos repeated that Sunday’s demonstrations were attended by “those who truly defend Brazil. We are the true patriots.” In São Paulo, the protest also featured a huge Brazilian flag, in contrast to the American flag present at the rally of Bolsonaro supporters on September 7.

The defense of nationalism, however, has nothing to do with defending the interests of the Brazilian working class, which shares common economic and political interests with the international working class, including in the United States.

With their defense of national sovereignty, the PT, PSOL and the unions they control are promoting the interests of Brazilian capitalism. Their response to the crisis is the promotion of “national unity” of the Brazilian bourgeoisie and a bankrupt “multipolar” solution to the crisis of imperialism. As the PT made clear in a document from late August:

The fight against imperialism, allied with Bolsonaro’s extreme right, fascism, and neoliberalism, must take place on two complementary fronts: through popular mobilizations, in the streets and on social media, and through the construction of broad national and international alliances, also articulated at the institutional and diplomatic

levels.

Given this situation, it is imperative that we place at the center of our actions the construction of a broad alliance in defense of sovereignty and democracy, under the leadership of President Lula. In each state of Brazil, we will work to form powerful coalitions that strengthen President Lula’s reelection campaign, guarantee a majority in the Senate and the House of Representatives, and support the national development project that is already underway.

The failure of this perspective could not be clearer. At the national level, this broad front includes, as PT President Edinho Silva has already made clear, the same parties that voted en masse in favor of the Shielding Amendment and the amnesty bill. Internationally, the PT wants to strengthen relations with imperialist governments in Europe and the Democratic Party in the US, whose policies of austerity, repression, and support for genocide in Gaza have paved the way for the far right around the world.

As last Saturday’s statement by the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) in the US stressed, “The working class cannot defend its jobs and interests by supporting economic nationalism, which is utterly reactionary in an era of global integration of production.”

The PT’s promotion of reactionary nationalist illusions leads only to defeat. Throughout the world, the profound corruption of the capitalist political order, the deepening of austerity policies and the drive by the ruling class toward dictatorship and war are fundamental characteristics of a global capitalist system marked by growing crises.



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