

Porto Alegre Conference: How not to fight fascism

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From March 26 and 29, representatives of dozens of pseudo-left organizations from around the world gathered in Porto Alegre, capital of Brazil's southern state of Rio Grande do Sul, for the so-called "1st International Antifascist Conference for the Sovereignty of Peoples." With 4,000 participants and a "forum of authorities and parliamentarians" from some 40 countries, the event was celebrated by its organizers as a "qualitative leap in the international coordination" of the left.

The document adopted by the conference, dubbed the Porto Alegre Charter, acknowledges explosive signs of the world imperialist crisis and a growing social radicalization. It declares:

That same week, the Nuestra América convoy to Cuba took place; more than a million people took to the streets in Argentina, fighting for memory and against Milei; there were hundreds of thousands at the antifascist mobilization in the United Kingdom, and especially the great and historic "No Kings" demonstration in the United States, where millions of Americans gathered in hundreds of cities, once again declaring Trump an enemy of humanity.

The capitalist-imperialist system is living through a profound crisis and a sharp economic, social and moral decline. The response of the imperialist powers to their decline has been the fostering of fascism everywhere, the imposition of neoliberal policies, military aggression against weaker nations and their recolonization.

But far from representing a step forward in the construction of an international movement against fascism and war, the Porto Alegre Conference was a platform for political forces determined to block the development of a revolutionary and independent response by the working class to the deepening world capitalist crisis.

The pseudo-left forces gathered in Porto Alegre, as the "Charter" itself acknowledges, "are diverse and present different analyses, strategies and tactics, programs and alliance policies." Each pursuing its own unprincipled nationalist agenda, they are incapable of reaching agreement on the causes of and the necessary response to the international crisis. But they converge around one fundamental imperative: the need to channel the growing radicalization of the masses back into the rotten political structures of the bourgeois state.

The conference was convened by the leaderships of parties that prop up the government of President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and are engaged in a campaign for his re-election in Brazil's October elections. These are: Lula's own Workers Party (PT), the Socialism and Liberty Party (PSOL) and the Communist Party of Brazil (PCdoB). Among these organizations, the most active role in organizing the event was played by the PSOL's internal faction, the Socialist Left Movement (MES).

With its political origins in Morenoism—the tendency founded by the late Argentine revisionist Nahuel Moreno—the MES emerged as an internal current of the PT, with its activity concentrated in electoral politics in Rio Grande do Sul. After its leading figure, then federal deputy Luciana Genro, was expelled from the PT at the start of Lula's first term (2003–2006), the MES joined other pseudo-left currents to found the PSOL.

In the field of international relations, the MES spent more than two decades with the status of a "sympathizing organization" of the Pabloite United Secretariat—which fraudulently presents itself as the "Fourth International." The last congress of the Pabloite international, held in February 2025, approved the MES's admission as a full member organization in Brazil.

Explaining the process of organizing the event in Brazil and internationally, and highlighting the political forces involved—all directly tied to the bourgeois political establishment of their own countries—the MES wrote in a celebratory balance sheet of the Antifascist Conference:

The genesis of this triumph... lies in the unity between the PSOL of Rio Grande do Sul and the PT of Porto Alegre, later incorporating other actors such as the PCdoB, the MST and Andes, the latter responsible alongside the Lauro Campos e Marielle Franco Foundation, the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation and an effort by MES-PSOL itself as structural guarantors of the gathering. The international reach was only possible from the global effort made by the Committee for the Abolition of Illegitimate Debts (CADTM), with comrade Eric Toussaint at the helm, to connect the Fourth International (which was represented by dozens of sections and members) and other sectors that joined the call for an international antifascist front, published to amplify the conference.

The presence of different international revolutionary and socialist currents was qualitatively significant, such as the DSA [Democratic Socialists of America] (where the Bread & Roses current played a central role), parliamentarians of the European left, with weight given to La France Insoumise and other antifascist groups from France (NPA [Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste], Après, Attac [Association pour la Taxation des Transactions financières et pour l'Action Citoyenne], Le Digue and Jovem Guarda); the leaders and parliamentarians of the Workers' Party of Turkey; the Argentine delegation was the largest with nearly 200 people (composed by the committee with Vientos del Pueblo, Libres del Sur, MST [Movimiento Socialista de los Trabajadores] which has a historical relationship with us and is developing through the International Socialist League, and UP [Unidad Popular]); the Uruguayan delegation with a bus from the PIT/CNT [Plenario Intersindical de Trabajadores / Convención Nacional de Trabajadores], with the PCU [Partido Comunista del

Uruguay] and the Party of People's Victory standing out. In addition to the significant delegations from North America, with dozens of cadres and leaders, such as from Puerto Rico (from Democracia Socialista and Movimiento Victoria Ciudadana, among other movements) and Mexico (MSP [Movimiento Socialista de los Trabajadores — Poder Popular], ONPP [Organización Nacional del Poder Popular], PRT [Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores], as well as leaders from the electrical workers). From South Africa came comrades from Zabalaza, as well as from Australia, militants from the Socialist Alliance and Green Left.

Summing up the Conference's political horizon, strictly limited to promoting electoral fronts with so-called "democratic" bourgeois parties, the MES declared in the same article:

The unity expressed in the activity, with the leading role of MES-PSOL and various sectors of the Fourth International, without exclusion or imposition of other sectors, is a step forward. The Porto Alegre activity arms us, on the national and international terrain, for the challenges ahead, where the Brazilian election itself will be a key chapter in confronting imperialism and Trump. We will have three decisive, polarized elections, with likely interference from Big Tech: the Colombian presidential election, the Brazilian general election and the US midterms.

This orientation—subordinating the "antifascist struggle" to the bourgeois electoral calendar and to fronts with parties of the establishment—is not a new point of departure. It is the direct continuation of the policy that the PT, PSOL and PCdoB have applied in Brazil over the past four years in response to Bolsonaro's fascist conspiracy. That the conference proposed to internationalize this model is, in itself, a confession about its true character.

Brazil's January 8, 2023 coup and the pseudo-Left's "antifascism" fraud

It is particularly revealing that the conference, held in Brazil itself and declaredly born from the January 8 episode, refused to examine that experience. The conference's own co-organizer Eric Toussaint, in an interview on the eve of the event, identified January 8, 2023 as its direct origin: "*On January 8, 2023, shortly after losing the presidential elections to Lula, Jair Bolsonaro attempted a coup d'état in Brazil. [...] These episodes highlighted the danger posed by the advance of the far right. From this awakening came the idea of organizing an antifascist initiative on an international scale.*"

Toussaint went further still, presenting the 2022 broad electoral front as a proven model: the PT, PCdoB and PSOL had demonstrated that it is "possible to halt the neo-fascist danger," by overcoming their disagreements to secure Lula's candidacy. That the conference born of January 8 refused any serious examination of what has occurred in Brazil since then—of the concrete results of that strategy and what they reveal about the character of the "broad front" as a response to fascism—is no casual omission. It is a political necessity.

Fascism as a product of the capitalist crisis

To understand why, one must begin from what the PT and its allies deliberately obscure: the rise of Bolsonaro and his fascist conspiracy was not a political aberration, a pathological deviation from normal bourgeois order. It was, on the contrary, the direct historical result of the crisis of the PT's own governments. Over the course of 13 years in federal power, the PT subordinated the trade unions and social movements to the management of the bourgeois state, applied policies of adjustment and austerity when circumstances demanded it and treated national capitalist development as its strategic horizon.

This political project catastrophically collapsed under the weight of the accumulated contradictions of Brazilian capitalism in 2015–2016. The result was not merely the destruction of the PT governments—it generated massive disillusionment and a rejection of the entire established political order among the working class, opening the space for the far right to exploit popular anger. The fascist conspiracy was not, moreover, the personal project of one eccentric leader: of the 37 people indicted by the Federal Police, 25 were active-duty or reserve military personnel, including four-star generals, the former Navy commander and the former Defense Minister. Detailed plans for the assassination of Lula, Vice President Alckmin and Supreme Court Justice Alexandre de Moraes were found typed up inside the Planalto presidential palace itself. Bolsonaro was a symptom of the trajectory of the bourgeois regime as a whole—and of the PT itself.

The "Broad Front" as the neutralization of the working class

The entire policy of the PT, PSOL and PCdoB toward this threat proceeded from the opposite premise: Bolsonaro had to be treated as an aberration, not as a product of capitalism in crisis; "bourgeois democracy" had to be defended in alliance with its own institutions, not through the independent mobilization of the working class. In practical terms, this meant ceding to the bourgeois courts and generals—the very forces that had participated in or tolerated the conspiracy—the responsibility for disarming the fascist threat. At Lula's inauguration on January 1, 2023, the president proclaimed that "democracy was the great winner." Eight days later, Bolsonaro's supporters ransacked the headquarters of all three branches of government in Brasília, tolerated by the military commanders as they encamped at the very gates of the Army General Headquarters. The undeclared purpose of this policy was to neutralize the working class as an independent political force. The perspective that fascism is an aberration, manageable within the existing regime, leads inexorably to the conclusion that the autonomous mobilization of workers—which would inevitably call into question not only Bolsonaro, but the capitalist system that produced him—was unnecessary and dangerous.

From electoral debacle to the new fascist offensive

The results of this strategy began to emerge clearly in the municipal elections of October 2024. The campaign of Guilherme Boulos for the mayoralty of São Paulo was emblematic: promoted by Lula himself as the candidate capable of "sweeping Bolsonaroism out of São Paulo," the PSOL leader adopted progressively more right-wing positions: pledging "fiscal balance," reinforcing the police apparatus and going so far as to cordially

participate in a live broadcast with Pablo Marçal, the most openly fascist candidate in the race. The result was a crushing defeat, concentrated precisely in the city's poorest peripheries. Not only did the "populist left" fail, its capitulation to the right's positions won no new voters.

The catastrophe was compounded in September 2025, when the Supreme Court convicted Bolsonaro, sentencing him to 27 years in prison. This verdict was hailed by the pseudo-left as the definitive confirmation of its strategy. But the conviction did not end the fascist offensive; it provided it a new platform. An "amnesty" campaign won a majority in Congress, mass demonstrations in support of Bolsonaro were led by the governors of the country's most powerful states, and Flávio Bolsonaro emerges today as second in presidential polling. The Lula government has responded by seeking to build a new "broad front" incorporating the very parties that voted in favor of amnesty for the coup plotters.

The "International Antifascist Conference" refused any honest examination of this experience, even though it unfolded in the very country that hosted the gathering and was declared its reason for being. This is more than an intellectual omission. It is a confession that the political model the conference sought to internationalize would not survive scrutiny of its own recent history. The Brazilian catastrophe is no accident: it is the necessary result of a policy that denies the capitalist roots of fascism, subordinates the working class to the bourgeois state in crisis, and transforms the "antifascist struggle" into political cover for the administration of the existing order.

The Legacy of the World Social Forum

The catastrophe of the past four years is not, however, merely the product of tactical errors or conjunctural opportunism. It is the expression of a longer-term political perspective whose roots run far deeper than the Bolsonaro cycle. The PT and its pseudo-left allies not only failed to respond to fascism; they themselves created the historical conditions for its emergence. They did so by subordinating the working class to the bourgeois state over decades, and by promoting, at each moment of crisis, the illusion that the capitalist order could be reformed from within through electoral fronts and institutional pressure. To fully understand what the Porto Alegre Conference represents, it is necessary to situate this political program within its historical genealogy.

It is no coincidence that the conference was held in Porto Alegre, and that the "Porto Alegre Charter" explicitly supports the holding of the next World Social Forum (WSF) in Benin in August 2026. The choice of the city was deliberately symbolic. As Toussaint himself explained, it sought to evoke the tradition of the WSF, founded in Porto Alegre in 2001. This connection is profoundly revealing, because the trajectory of the WSF is the exact mirror of what the Antifascist Conference promises to repeat.

The WSF was, according to Toussaint, "largely the offspring of a union between the Brazilian Workers Party of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and ATTAC." The latter emerged as a semi-official think tank of the French Socialist Party whose maximum political program was a "Tobin tax" on financial transactions. Porto Alegre was chosen as the venue for the first WSF gatherings because the PT had governed the city for four consecutive administrations, showcasing the "Participatory Budget" as a supposed "first step" toward socialism through the bourgeois state. Far from being an autonomous platform of the working class, the WSF was funded by the Ford Foundation, the World Bank, the European Commission, the United Nations and European governments, with 60 percent of its financing coming from NGOs that function as political instruments of the governments and corporations that finance them.

The most politically revealing moment in WSF history occurred in

January 2003, at the forum's third edition. Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva—freshly sworn in as president of Brazil—addressed 100,000 participants in Porto Alegre and boarded a plane hours later for Davos, where he met with bankers and heads of state. His government was at that moment raising interest rates to 25.5 percent and committing to the repayment of a \$260 billion debt on IMF terms. IMF Managing Director Anne Krueger publicly praised the new government's economic policies. The WSF thus served as ideological cover for a party that had become the guardian of bourgeois austerity at the very moment it presented itself as the vanguard of "another possible world."

Nothing better exposes the continuity between the WSF and the 2026 Conference than the fact that the same PT that organized Porto Alegre 2001 organized Porto Alegre 2026. Moreover, the Lula who flew from Porto Alegre to Davos in 2003 is the same Lula who today cuts public spending by R\$327 billion and leads the electoral polls with the support of a PSOL that voted, in March 2026, to back Lula in the first round without fielding any candidate of its own.

The trajectory of the WSF also documented the spectacular failure of every political experience the forum promoted. The Caracas WSF (2006) celebrated Hugo Chávez and his "21st-century socialism," a project that culminated in Venezuela's economic collapse and the authoritarianism of Nicolás Maduro, for whom the organizers of the 2026 Conference still demand solidarity. The European "altermondialism" embraced by the WSF produced Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain, parties that came to power with radical rhetoric and proceeded to administer the austerity imposed by international financial institutions. No balance sheet of any of these experiences was presented in Porto Alegre. The Charter simply takes up the WSF's slogan—"another world is possible"—redefining it as a "socialist, ecological, democratic, feminist and anti-racist future," without a word about what happened to all the governments that promised exactly that.

What the working class needs

The 1st International Antifascist Conference for the Sovereignty of Peoples does not represent a step forward in the struggle against fascism and imperialism. It represents, on the contrary, a new chapter in the history of the political containment of working class struggle by pseudo-left apparatuses. This is a history whose previous chapters include the WSF, the Pink Tide, Syriza and Podemos. In each case, the radicalization of the masses was channeled into the framework of bourgeois politics, and the result was the weakening, not the strengthening, of the working class's resistance to fascism and imperialism.

The Latin American working class paid a devastating price in the second half of the last century for the subordination of the working class by social democracy, Stalinism and Pabloism to various forms of bourgeois nationalism, which politically disarmed the masses in the face of brutal dictatorships. The perspective offered by the Porto Alegre Conference—the "broad front" with bourgeois parties, the subordination of the class struggle to the electoral calendar, an "internationalism" that is, in practice, a collection of diverse national campaigns—is the repetition of that same catastrophic policy under new circumstances.

To prevent even more devastating betrayals and defeats at a moment of deepening world capitalist crisis and of the real rise of fascism, the only way forward for Brazilian and Latin American workers is to build an independent political leadership of the working class, in a break with the PT, the PSOL and all parties that subordinate the struggle of the exploited to the interests of the ruling classes. This requires the construction of sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International in

every country of Latin America. It represents the only political tradition that analyzed and predicted the trajectory of capitulation of these tendencies, and that defends the international unity of the working class not as electoral rhetoric, but as a program for world socialist revolution.



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