

“I was never a leftist,” Brazil’s Lula assures the IMF and imperialist powers at the G7

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Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva was last week at the G7 summit in Évian-les-Bains, France, as a guest of honor of the imperialist powers gathered to decide the next stages of an escalating global war and the brutal assault on the conditions of the international working class.

There, in a relaxed conversation with the heads of the IMF and German imperialism on the margins of the main proceedings, the Brazilian president—a former unionist and lifetime leader of the Workers Party (PT)—casually reassured them: “I was never a leftist.”

The exchange was unforced. “When you were president for the first time, everyone expected you to be a leftist, but you were not,” Kristalina Georgieva, the Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund, remarked to him. Lula answered without hesitation: “But I was never a leftist.” Beside them sat German Chancellor Friedrich Merz, who is overseeing the largest rearmament of his country since the Second World War.

Lula also remarked:

In the United States, the Republicans governed more than the Democrats. In France, the Socialists also governed far less. That is to say, what does this prove? That the world is not left-wing. The world follows the middle path. That is the truth.”

Lula portrayed his identification with the “left” as though it were all a big misunderstanding. But the millions of workers and young people who historically supported the Workers Party did so because they saw the PT and its main leader—who emerged from the factory floor and rose to the leadership of mass strikes that confronted the big multinational automakers and the Brazilian military dictatorship—as being the left-wing. Were they the victims of collective delirium?

Exactly 40 years ago, in 1986, interviewed by the journal *Socialismo e Democracia*, Lula was asked about his conception of differences between socialism and the different forms of capitalism. His answer would have likely scandalized Mrs. Georgieva and Mr. Merz. Let us quote it at length:

I see no difference between liberalism and capitalism. Liberalism, truth be told, is a practice, a political system in which the feudal lords appear as benevolent, as people capable of meeting even a demand of the working class and even permitting strikes or something at that level. Both things are totally different from socialism, because in socialism the

working class needs to have control over the means of production in order to determine not only what to produce, but to determine the wage level and working conditions. In the other systems, the working class has practically no chance of discussing or deciding this. The working class is greatly constrained because in those other systems what predominates are the interests of the groups that govern the country, without any possibility of working-class participation — that is, they make concessions to the working class provided those concessions do not jeopardize what is, for them, paramount: the question of large profits and large gains.

Asked about European social democracy, he was categorical: “I do not see social democracy as an alternative, as some people try to say, that it will be the third way. I do not think the third way can exist. Social democracy can only exist on the basis of the exploitation of other peoples.”

Despite this “left-wing” and often ambiguous rhetoric, Lula was never genuinely socialist. Rejecting any clear definition of its theory and program, the PT gave new life to the old opportunist formula of Edward Bernstein: “the movement is everything; the final goal — nothing.”

As Lula said in that same 1986 interview, in reference to East Germany and to Cuba, “I cannot draw a distinction between the socialism I dream of and that of those countries, because socialism can only be built in accordance with the thinking of Brazilians. ... We have to find our own means and put the socialist system into practice in Brazil.”

The empiricist theory espoused by the PT was not the invention of Lula and the trade-unionists of the Metalworkers Union of the ABC, the bureaucracy engaged in containing the mass eruption of the Brazilian working class of the late 1970’s/early 1980’s. This ideological framework was introduced to them by a group of renegades from Trotskyism.

The PT’s great intellectual patron and its first registered member was Mário Pedrosa, founder of the Brazilian section of the International Left Opposition in 1930. By the end of that decade, Pedrosa had broken with the Fourth International, aligning himself with the petty-bourgeois opposition of James Burnham and Max Shachtman. It was this consolidated repudiation of revolutionary Marxism—and not any ignorance—that he introduced into the PT’s founding.

At the party’s founding conference, at the Colégio Sion in 1980, Pedrosa proclaimed:

A mass party has no vanguard, no theories, no sacred book. It is what it is; it is guided by its practice, and it finds its way by instinct.

The “instinct” Pedrosa erected as a principle is the direct negation of everything Lenin and Trotsky defended: that without revolutionary theory there is no revolutionary practice, and that outside of the persistent struggle by a vanguard revolutionary party to introduce socialist consciousness into the living movement of the working class, spontaneity delivers it to bourgeois ideology.

With the blessing of Pedrosa, the Pabloite United Secretariat, alongside the Morenoite and Lambertist currents, provided the political foundation for the PT’s formation as an historical instrument for channeling the mass struggles of the Brazilian working class onto the safe terrain of bourgeois legality. The presentation of Lula as a “left-wing” and even “socialist” leader was not a misunderstanding on the part of the masses. It was the central mechanism of a deliberate operation to prevent those masses from building their own revolutionary party.

After three presidential terms in the service of Brazilian and imperialist capital, the illusions that the PT constitutes a bridge to socialism have been largely destroyed. Nevertheless, a huge portion of Lula’s electors have voted for him and support his reelection because they see the PT president as the left-wing political alternative.

The same is true of a huge number of people around the world who see in the Brazilian president a spokesman for left-wing opposition to the unjust world order dominated by US and European imperialist capital. This, too, is not a mere “misunderstanding.” It is the product of deliberate and systematic deception.

In April, at the Global Progressive Mobilisation in Barcelona, explicitly speaking as a representative of “left-wing governments,” Lula offered a calculated self-criticism:

Left-wing governments win elections with a left-wing platform and then implement austerity measures. They abandon public policies in the name of governability. We have become the system. That is why it comes as no surprise now that the other side presents itself as anti-system.

And he added that “The first commandment for progressives must be consistency. We cannot run for office with one platform and then implement another.” This public contrition was nothing but the management of disillusionment—a gesture toward those who had turned away, a promise of future coherence.

Open adaptation to the extreme right

At Évian, he gave a true demonstration of his consistency, as he claimed that the “world is not left-wing.” The “middle path” he now presents as a natural order of things lies far below the “third way” of social democracy that Lula once declared impossible. It is open adaptation to the extreme right: a midpoint between the social democracy of the past and an ascendant fascism.

Lula pointed to the United States and to France as examples of right-wing electoral success, but the more pertinent example is Brazil itself and the bitterly contested race he is waging against the fascist Flávio Bolsonaro, son of the ex-president convicted of attempting a coup, in October’s election. The implied lesson is that the far-right’s program must be embraced because it reflects popular aspirations.

The argument rests on two political deceptions. The first is the identification of bourgeois elections—shaped at every turn by the economic weight and ideological monopoly of the capitalist elite—with the authentic will of the masses. The second is an inversion of reality that Lula himself had demolished in Barcelona two months earlier. The masses did not turn towards fascism. They turned against the parties that win power with left-wing rhetoric and rule for capital. Correctly identifying such parties with “the system,” the masses look for a way out—finding at the front of the queue the demagoguery of the far right.

Lula’s broad-front government installed the former right-wing governor Geraldo Alckmin as vice president, imposed a “new fiscal framework” of social cuts on the working class and tours the imperialist capitals auctioning off Brazil’s natural resources. In May, at the White House, he described his rapport with Donald Trump as “love at first sight,” offered up Brazil’s reserves of critical minerals and rare earths with the declaration that “we have no preference” among the imperialist buyers, and waved away the invasion of Iran, the occupation of Venezuela and the strangulation of Cuba.

His participation in the G7 at Évian is the logical extension of this role. Seated beside Merz, who is raising the German military budget to record levels and musing openly about nuclear weapons, and before Georgieva, who supervises the extraction of debt tribute from the poorest nations on earth, Lula tendered the services of the Brazilian bourgeoisie—balancing between a European imperialism entering into direct war with Russia and the US imperialism of Trump, which intervenes ever more brazenly in Brazil and across Latin America.

“The world follows the middle path. That is the truth,” Lula assured the IMF. It is a lie—the formula of an exhausted social layer that has mistaken its own demoralization for the condition of the world. The very powers at whose feet Lula lays his credentials, propelling humanity toward nuclear catastrophe and unloading the wreckage of the capitalist breakdown onto the backs of the workers, are generating the conditions for their own opposite.

From Europe to the Americas, from strikes to revolts, the working class is colliding head-on with austerity, war and state repression. This radicalization does not move toward the middle. It goes left. It will sweep aside the apparatuses of the “official left,” the pro-capitalist union bureaucracies and the Lulas who for four decades have stood guard against it, clearing the way for the construction of a revolutionary, Trotskyist leadership in the working class of Brazil and the world.



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