The pseudo-left and Brazil's crisis elections

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1 October 2026

Brazil's October 4 general elections are taking place amid the deepest crisis of the bourgeois regime erected upon the 1988 Constitution—the first after the end of the US-backed military dictatorship (1964–1985). The weight of the global crisis, with military escalation and the ruling elite's turn toward dictatorship, is making itself felt intensely in Brazil.

The short-circuiting of the Brazilian bourgeois order is the national form of this crisis. It has erupted sharply in recent weeks with an open conflict in the Brazilian Supreme Court. Rival factions in this highest body of the bourgeois state—presented in recent years as the guarantor of the constitutional order—have begun publicly fighting each other, with accusations of election interference and of the involvement of justices in Brazil's biggest financial scandal, the Banco Master case.

Like other nominally left-wing governments around the world, the government of President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (Workers Party–PT), incapable of offering any way forward for the workers of Brazil, is advancing an austerity, nationalist and militarist program. The direct consequence of this policy has been the electoral rise of Flávio Bolsonaro, a fascist candidate and direct heir of the 2022–23 coup conspiracy, who is statistically tied with Lula in runoff polling.

Added to this picture is the intensification of US imperialism's offensive against Latin America—one of the fronts in the escalation of the new world war. Washington is openly intervening in the Brazilian electoral process in favor of Flávio, who has sworn to continue the fascist project of his father, former President Jair Bolsonaro, imprisoned for the January 8, 2023 coup attempt, and who has openly called for Washington's intervention in the electoral process.

In this context, the pseudo-left organizations are, for the most part, calling for support for Lula's candidacy in order, supposedly, once again—as in 2022—to "stop fascism" in Brazil. This is a fraud, exposed by the disastrous results of this strategy four years on.

The most revealing case is that of the Socialism and Liberty Party (PSOL), the largest party of the pseudo-left. The party emerged in 2004 as a supposed "left opposition" to the first Lula government, only to integrate itself ever more completely into the PT over the years. Today, it holds two ministries in the Lula government, with its best-known figure, Guilherme Boulos, serving as minister-chief of the General Secretariat of the Presidency. Both a part and a promoter of the PT's "Broad Front" with bourgeois parties, PSOL rejected a federation with the PT at the beginning of this year only to confirm its support for Lula's reelection in the first round.

There is another set of pseudo-left organizations which, refusing to call for a vote for Lula in the first round, are running their own candidates. The main one is the candidacy of Hertz Dias of the Morenoite Unified Socialist Workers Party (PSTU), around which a series of organizations have gathered claiming to represent an alternative of "class independence"—only to return to Lula's camp in the second round, as they did in previous elections. The function these pseudo-left organizations perform is to subordinate the working class to the PT, the trade union bureaucracy and, ultimately, the bourgeois national state.

The "radical" wing of the Broad Front

Launched in July, the Radical Left Caucus (Bancada da Esquerda Radical) brings together candidates from the Socialist Left Movement (MES), a Morenoite tendency that was among PSOL's founders, and from other currents within the party, such as Sâmia Bomfim, Fernanda Melchionna and Glauber Braga. The group is completed by the neo-Stalinist Jones Manoel and at least one PT figure. It presents itself as further to the left not only than the PT, but than PSOL's own majority leadership, and speaks of revolution and socialism. This bloc of parliamentary candidates is at the service of PSOL's construction of Lula's Broad Front, dressing it up in pseudo-revolutionary rhetoric.

The Radical Left Caucus manifesto defines its objectives as promoting "an inversion of the logic that organizes the state and the economy." It continues:

> The measures presented do not close the debate: they aim to open a new strategic horizon of popular sovereignty, social justice and the ecosocialist reorganization of the economy.
>
> If imperialism intends to keep the country on its knees, supported by the rentier, mining and landowning factions of the Brazilian bourgeoisie, our response must be organization, popular mobilization, sovereignty and revolutionary political leadership.

The passage condenses the method and program of this "radical left." The enemy is defined exclusively as imperialism supported by specific factions of the Brazilian bourgeoisie. This echoes the old Stalinist thesis of a productive national bourgeoisie, to which the working class must subordinate itself in the name of the development of capitalism in the country. The socialist revolution is treated as a second stage, belonging to an indefinite future.

The manifesto's 10 measures give this "developmentalist" project a precise content. Faced with Trump's tariff war, the Caucus proposes to "review trade agreements that limit the country's industrial, technological and public procurement policy" and to "Restore the state's capacity to use tariffs, local content requirements, subsidies and industrial policy instruments without external restrictions."

As the statement of the Socialist Equality Group on Trump's tariffs in 2025 explained, the tariff war is a stage in the preparation of military war. In the face of this threat, the Caucus merely proposes to return to the Brazilian state its protectionist instruments "without external restrictions." This policy ties Brazilian workers to "their own" national bourgeoisie and has nothing to offer workers internationally—neither in Latin America and the other countries oppressed by imperialism, nor to workers in the United States, who are also hit by Trump's tariffs.

The same applies to the measure that best exposes the strategic meaning of the program: "Renationalize strategic sectors, guarantee energy sovereignty and create Terrabras." The latter would be a new state-owned

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company—along the lines of those created by the corporatist government of Getúlio Vargas in the midst of World War II—"to mine and industrially process rare earths and strategic minerals, with value added in the country."

Rare earths and critical minerals are the raw material of modern warfare: missiles, drones, radars, guidance systems and all military electronics. They are at the center of the conflict between the United States and China, and Brazil's reserves are coveted by Washington. During his last visit to the White House, Lula announced: "We have no preference. What we want is to form partnerships, to share with American, Chinese, German, Japanese, French companies, or whoever wants to participate with us." The "rare earths state company" advocated by the pseudo-left would be at the service of this program, which corresponds to the interests of a national bourgeoisie intrinsically subordinated to the imperialist drive to redivide the world.

The Caucus's response to the two great questions that will define the future of humanity, the climate crisis and the development of artificial intelligence, follows the same logic. Its manifesto proposes a "National Green and Sovereign Innovation System," which brings together universities, research institutes and companies under state coordination and subordinates industrial policy to "missions" of "national sovereignty" and the reduction of external dependence.

No problem is more evidently planetary than the climate catastrophe. It can only be confronted through the international planning of production and energy, which requires overcoming the system of nation-states and private ownership of the means of production. The Caucus transforms the climate crisis into a "mission of national sovereignty" of the Brazilian state.

With regard to "Big Tech," the Caucus proposes creating "national social networks" and regulating the platforms. A finished expression of its petty-bourgeois utopian nationalism, the proposal does not touch the ownership of the technology monopolies: it merely transfers control from the American Big Tech companies to the Brazilian bourgeois state. Technology, the product of social labor, will only serve human needs, and not profit, if these monopolies are expropriated and placed under the democratic control of the working class. As for the "regulation" of the internet, it is precisely the mechanism through which capitalist states have been imposing censorship on socialist and anti-war voices.

Lula's name appears nowhere in the manifesto. The silence is not accidental. The Caucus's signatories are campaigning openly for his reelection, as well as for Simone Tebet and Fernando Haddad in São Paulo and for the PDT's Juliana Brizola in Rio Grande do Sul.

In the face of the crisis that has erupted in the Supreme Federal Court (STF), exposing the rottenness of the entire Brazilian bourgeois political order, the Caucus's proponents have redoubled their call to support Lula's Broad Front.

In "Yellow Light," published on September 9, MES leader Israel Dutra wrote: "The coup-mongers and Trump are going to play hardball to prevent Lula's victory. Our side, the side of working women and men, needs to respond in kind." "Responding in kind," for Dutra and his pseudo-left collaborators, comes down to "organizing to confront the far right, with street mobilization, boosting candidacies, campaign stalls, in movements like 'Ele Não' [Not Him] and 'Vira Voto' [Flip the Vote]."

This "activism" is conceived entirely as an appendage of Lula's campaign. It is the model the MES rehearsed at the antifascist conference in Porto Alegre in March, which fused antifascism with the "sovereignty of peoples" in a front with the PT. Valerio Arcary, leader of Resistência (Resistance), another Morenoite internal current of PSOL, formulates the objective frankly: to ensure that Lula defeats Bolsonarism in order to "buy time." In this wing of the pseudo-left, subordination to the PT and the national state is openly declared.

The bloc around the PSTU: electoral "independence," patriotic program

A set of pseudo-left organizations presents itself as the alternative to this capitulation. They are grouped around the presidential candidacy of Hertz Dias of the PSTU, with Vera Lúcia running for governor of São Paulo.

Among the organizations participating in this trap are the Revolutionary Workers Movement (MRT), the Brazilian section of the Permanent Revolution Current, which publishes *Esquerda Diário*, and the Brazilian Revolutionary Communist Party (PCBR), a split from the Stalinist PCB, previously led by Jones Manoel—who joined PSOL to launch his candidacy alongside the Radical Left Caucus.

The bloc revives the experience of the 2022 Revolutionary Socialist Pole, when a series of pseudo-left organizations turned to the PSTU to run their candidates on the party's ticket. But its current configuration has a more recent and more revealing landmark. These organizations formed a nationalist political unity, supposedly "independent" of the Lula government, in response to the tariffs Trump launched against Brazil in July 2025.

Hertz Dias says his candidacy aims to "reverse the process of decline" of the country. Among the central points of his program are the renationalization of "strategic sectors" and a state-owned rare earths company, both "under workers' control." It is the same agenda as Terrabras and "sovereignty," with the addition of a "workerist" formula.

But it is in the arms industry that this orientation reaches its most finished expression. Since 2023, the São José dos Campos Metalworkers Union, led by the PSTU and the main base of CSP-Conlutas, has been lobbying the Ministry of Defense for the nationalization of the war industry to manufacture fighter jets, missiles, warships and submarines. Meanwhile, it kept isolated the strike by workers at Avibras, the largest company in the Brazilian defense industry, which filed for bankruptcy in 2022. The strike ended in an agreement at the beginning of this year, celebrated as a victory by the bureaucracy, which eliminated half the jobs. The campaign led the union into an open alliance with the military and with figures of the nationalist far right, documented by the World Socialist Web Site.

On July 24, at the ceremony marking the reactivation of Avibras, the Morenoite bureaucracy shared the platform with Lula, Vice President Geraldo Alckmin and the three commanders of the Armed Forces. There, Lula compared the Armed Forces to God, an institution one turns to in every crisis. The union president, Weller Gonçalves of the PSTU, handed him a document proposing to renationalize Embraer, nationalize Avibras and all strategic defense companies, and merge them into one large state-owned industry. The justification was the rivalry among the great powers: no country that wishes to preserve its sovereignty could do without a national defense industry. Lula praised the union for the "maturity" of its understanding of the political moment.

The PSTU's international position is an integral part of this reactionary national program, not a separate chapter. In 2023, the International Workers League-Fourth International (IWL-FI), its international tendency, advocated intensifying the campaign of "arms for Ukraine" by the imperialist powers, to be taken up by all trade unions. The union leadership translated this into the argument that the US-NATO war against Russia opened a unique market opportunity for Avibras rockets. Today, four of the five largest customers of the Brazilian defense industry are NATO members, among them Germany and the United States, and Brazilian equipment is being used in the wars in Ukraine and Iran.

Under the banner of "national defense," the PSTU proposes Brazil's entry into the imperialist world war: as a supplier to NATO's war and as an armed power, built in alliance with the military and sections of the far right. The Brazilian population is being called upon to see an opportunity

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in world war.

The MRT and the role of centrism

Within this bloc, the MRT plays a specific role. It is the organization that speaks most insistently of "class independence" and criticizes the PSTU from the left. Its electoral statement of September 16 declares:

> [W]e of the MRT defend political independence at the service of the interests of the working people in these elections. … This means frontally combating the far right of Flávio Bolsonaro, Trump's lackey, independently of the class conciliation of the Lula-Alckmin Broad Front. … It is necessary to support independent candidacies.

The independence the MRT claims is defined against the Broad Front and the "class conciliation" of Lula and Alckmin, not against the bourgeois national state. What it offers, in practice, is a vote for the PSTU. Here the MRT plays the classic role of centrism: it oscillates between revolutionary formulas and an opportunist policy. In a crisis situation, its decisive function is to gather up the workers and youth who are breaking with the PT to the left and to return them, with a seal of "independence," to the very forces from which they were trying to escape.

What the MRT says about the Radical Left Caucus makes clear the content of this "independence":

> [T]he Radical Left Caucus, with parliamentarians and candidacies that correctly opposed the federation and that present a program further to the left, is also openly and uncritically campaigning for "Lula lá" and for the Broad Front. … Even Jones Manoel, who in recent years has been voicing important criticisms of the government's economic policy, such as against its privatizations, has now adopted a line of support and campaigning for Lula in the first round.

The "program further to the left" that the MRT certifies is the one we examined above: Terrabras, tariffs "without external restrictions" and the "National Green and Sovereign System." The MRT's only criticism is the campaign for Lula. The nationalist content of the program, the MRT does not question. It shares it.

This becomes even clearer when one examines what the MRT values as a sign of "class independence" in the candidacy it supports:

> We consider a point of support the defense that the candidacy of Hertz Dias has been making of programmatic elements such as the renationalization of companies in strategic sectors under workers' control, the full repeal of the reforms already approved, the defense of a state-owned company in the area of rare earths under workers' control and the reduction of the work week without loss of pay, with an end to the 6x1 schedule and an increase in the minimum wage in line with DIEESE, with open criticism of the Broad Front.

The "renationalization of companies in strategic sectors" has, in the PSTU of 2026, a precise content: it is the program for a state-owned war industry that the São José dos Campos union handed to Lula on the platform with the military commanders. The "point of support" for the MRT's class independence is the demand that Lula praised for its "maturity."

"Workers' control" also has a definite, fraudulent content: it is the control of the trade union bureaucracy that betrays strikes and isolates the working class nationally and regionally. Trotsky described the "workers' administration" of the nationalized railways and oil industry in Cárdenas's Mexico as an administration exercised by a trade union bureaucracy independent of the workers and wholly dependent on the bourgeois state: a means of liquidating the unions as organs of struggle and converting them into an instrument of state direction over the class. With unions today incomparably more integrated into the state and the corporations, "workers' control" over a state-owned war industry would mean the Conlutas bureaucracy administering the war effort.

In the same statement, the MRT lists its differences with the PSTU. It mentions the "international debates" on the war in Ukraine and the PSTU's support for movements demanding more investment in the police. It places "above all" the question of the independence of the judiciary, that is, the PSTU's refusal to characterize the 2016 impeachment of the PT's Dilma Rousseff as a coup. All these differences, the MRT asserts, must be debated within the framework of a "profound unity of action."

The hierarchy is revealing. The world war is relegated to an "international debate," below a dispute over the characterization of the institutions of the national regime. About sharing a platform with the military commanders and the document handed to Lula, there is not a word. The silence follows from the statement itself: the demand the MRT chose as the basis for unity is the program of that very campaign.

The MRT mechanically separates the national from the international. It treats "arms for Ukraine" as a theoretical difference and supports, as a national programmatic point, the industry that sells those arms. NATO's war is Avibras's market.

Its criticism of the PSTU thus functions as an instrument of control. It names secondary differences in order to certify the PSTU's "class independence" and prevents the workers and youth who are drawn to the bloc from drawing the necessary conclusions: the break with the pseudo-left and the trade union bureaucracy.

The MRT's conception of imperialism lies at the foundation of this policy. The statement presents Trump's offensive as the United States' response to its "hegemonic decline," demonstrated by its setbacks in Iran and its competition with China. The development of world war does not appear. Iran emerges as proof of American weakness, not as a front in a global war stretching from Ukraine to the Persian Gulf and the Caribbean.

What emerges is the idea that the decline of American hegemony opens space for semi-colonial states, such as Brazil, to assert their sovereignty. Hence the demand that "the oil and the rare earths be ours" and the accusation that Lula keeps the country in a "double dependence" on the United States and China. The defense of the "sovereignty" of the Brazilian national state is not a defensive position, but the MRT's strategic perspective. The crisis of imperialism is not understood for what it is: an essentially revolutionary crisis, which poses the alternative between world war and world socialist revolution.

The MRT's response to the STF crisis completes this picture. In its articles on the Banco Master case, it argued:

> It is necessary to raise the perspective of a Free and Sovereign Constituent Assembly, imposed by the mobilization of the workers and the great popular majorities, without the tutelage of Congress,

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> the STF, the Armed Forces or the big economic groups. A Constituent Assembly that is not convened to patch up the existing institutions, but to allow millions to discuss and decide directly on the great structural problems of the country.

The "great structural problems of the country" that this Constituent Assembly is supposed to resolve are, according to the MRT, the end of the 6x1 schedule and the repeal of the "reforms that took away rights"—that is, those approved after Rousseff's impeachment—the "rupture of the relations of subordination to the United States," "control" over strategic resources, "starting with oil and rare earths," and a "radical reorganization of the judiciary." These measures do not point to any break with capital and systematically dissolve class antagonisms into the "common" interests of the nation.

The Constituent Assembly of 1987–88 was the mechanism through which the Brazilian ruling class diverted the struggle against the military dictatorship into the reconstruction of a civilian bourgeois regime. Four decades later, the regime born of that process is in terminal crisis. The MRT's response, far from presenting a perspective for its revolutionary overthrow, offers a perspective for its refurbishing on the same foundations.

Four decades ago, the PT served as the principal guarantor of the refoundation of the bourgeois political order in Brazil, keeping under control the masses of the working class organized in the party and its unions. Today, this mechanism for controlling the class struggle is also exhausted. The MRT's response aims, in the same way, to restore the legitimacy of these bureaucratic apparatuses for controlling the masses. It assigns to the CUT, CTB, Força Sindical, UGT and CSP-Conlutas the responsibility for calling a general strike that would lend legitimacy to the new "Constituent Assembly."

The "free and sovereign Constituent Assembly" is a recurring formula of the Permanent Revolution Current, to which the MRT belongs, for diverting working class uprisings into the reform of the bourgeois state. In Chile in 2019, the MRT's sister organization raised the same slogan in the face of the largest revolt in decades, presenting it as an experience that would lead the masses to the conclusion that a workers' government was necessary. The Chilean bourgeoisie took up the demand itself: the agreement signed in November of that year by the parties in parliament converted the revolt into a constitutional process, which ended with two proposals rejected at the ballot box and paved the way for the election of the fascist José Antonio Kast.

The "independence" of the bloc around the PSTU has an expiration date. In 2022, the PSTU called for a "critical" vote for Lula in the second round. In 2024, it did the same for Boulos in São Paulo. The MRT, without calling for a vote, declared that it would be on the front line against Ricardo Nunes and Pablo Marçal. Nothing indicates that 2026 will be any different.

The world crisis and the response of the working class

From the Radical Left Caucus to the PSTU and the MRT, each variant of the pseudo-left responds to the crisis by confining the working class within the framework of the bourgeois national state: through "sovereignty," through the war industry, through the Constituent Assembly. This response runs counter to the requirements of the working class in the current epoch.

As David North explained in the opening report to the Ninth Congress of the Socialist Equality Party in the United States, the question is no longer whether a third world war will break out. The war is underway and is developing as a metastatic process: it spreads as a chronic condition, fuses previously separate conflicts and subordinates every country to preparation for the general conflagration.

In 1914, in the face of the outbreak of World War I, Trotsky identified the root of this catastrophe: "The present war is at bottom a revolt of the forces of production against the political form of nation and state. It means the collapse of the national state as an independent economic unit."

More than a century later, this contradiction has reached unprecedented intensity. Production has been reorganized as a single, globally integrated process. The worker in Guangdong, the one in Stuttgart, the one in São Paulo and the one in Detroit do not produce similar things in parallel: they work at different stations of a single process, on a single product. The bourgeoisie draws from this the conclusion that the resources, markets and supply routes of the entire world are vital national interests, to be secured by force. The working class is being driven, by the same transformation, to the opposite conclusion. Critical minerals, the climate crisis, artificial intelligence and the war industry, around which the pseudo-left builds its "sovereign" program, are precisely the points at which this contradiction becomes a question of the survival of humanity.

The short-circuiting of the Brazilian bourgeois order is the national form of this crisis. Incapable of breaking with imperialism without threatening the capital it represents, the PT responds with rearmament and "national unity" between workers and bosses, while its austerity policy feeds fascism.

But the working class is entering the scene. The wave of strikes spreading across the country, part of an international movement against the austerity imposed to finance repression and militarism, is directed squarely against the Lula government, while the union federations campaign for his reelection and work to isolate these struggles.

The fight against austerity, against fascism and against imperialist aggression is one and the same. Flávio's fascism will not be defeated by the government that creates the conditions for its growth, but by the same movement that is confronting that government in the strikes.

The answer to Washington's offensive against Brazil and Latin America lies in the independent mobilization of the working class of the region, in alliance with the workers of the United States. Exploited by the same corporations and threatened by the same war and the same turn of the ruling class toward dictatorship, workers throughout the hemisphere have common interests. Only the revolutionary unity of the international working class can defeat imperialism.

This struggle requires its own forms of organization: rank-and-file committees independent of and in opposition to the trade union bureaucracy, linked internationally through the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees. And it requires a socialist and internationalist program that treats natural resources, technology and production as the common heritage of humanity, to be planned internationally under the control of the working class.

A metalworker in São José dos Campos has more in common with a Boeing worker in Seattle, with a worker in the German defense industry or with an Iranian worker than with Lula, the Brazilian generals or the businessmen who today control Avibras.

This requires a break with the PT, with the union federations and with the pseudo-left that orbits around them. The decisive task is to build the Brazilian section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, the world party of socialist revolution, and to arm the workers and youth who are entering into struggle with this perspective.

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