Brazil’s elections being held under shadow of imperialist intervention and fascist threat

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Brazilians go to the polls this Sunday, October 4, in the most tension-filled elections since the end of the US-backed military dictatorship (1964–1985). Polls point to a runoff between President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva of the Workers Party (PT) and Flávio Bolsonaro of the Liberal Party (PL), who are technically tied.

Flávio is running on behalf of his father, the fascist former president Jair Bolsonaro, who is serving a 27-year prison sentence for leading the coup conspiracy that culminated in the fascist assault on the buildings housing the three branches of government in Brasília on January 8, 2023. Flávio has sworn to continue this project, working closely with US imperialism, which is openly intervening in the Brazilian elections.

The electoral contest is, at the same time, dominated by the sharpening crisis of Brazil’s bourgeois institutions. On the eve of the vote, the Supreme Federal Court (STF)—which over the past several years has presented itself as the guardian of democratic order in the country—has been engulfed by the Banco Master corruption scandal and torn by an open war between judges representing rival factions of the bourgeoisie.

In this context, a wave of strikes by public- and private-sector workers is colliding head-on with the program of nationalism and austerity commonly promoted by Lula, Flávio and all the ruling-class candidates.

None of these phenomena is a local accident. They are the national form of the world crisis of capitalism, which finds expression in the developing global war and in the turn of the ruling class in every country toward dictatorship.

The imperialist offensive

The elections in Brazil are taking place amid an explosive reorganization of the political order in Latin America. American imperialism has adopted as its official doctrine military and economic domination of the entire hemisphere, as a platform for war against China, today South America’s main trading partner.

The invasion of Venezuela in January of this year inaugurated a new phase of open US neocolonial intervention. The kidnapping of President Nicolás Maduro was followed by the Pentagon’s appropriation of Venezuelan oil, in collaboration with the Chavista regime itself. Added to this intervention are summary executions of fishermen in the Caribbean and the Pacific, military operations under the pretext of combating “narco-terrorism” and the blockade strangling Cuba, now directly threatened with invasion.

Fascistic governments, continuing the political tradition of the dictatorships of the 1970s, linked together in the so-called Shield of the Americas and advancing measures of police dictatorship in their own countries, now dominate nearly the entire region, promoted by Washington’s direct intervention. Lula is among the last remnants of the Pink Tide, which collapsed in disrepute after betraying the expectations of the masses who elected these purportedly “left” bourgeois governments.

The Brazilian elections are today the focal point of Washington’s regional offensive. The Trump administration imposed punitive tariffs on Brazil, openly justified as a response to the “persecution” of Bolsonaro, and designated Brazilian criminal factions as terrorist organizations, the same framework used to justify the attack on Venezuela. Argentine President Javier Milei, whose far-right regime constitutes the spearhead of the US imperialist project in the region, came to São Paulo to launch Flávio’s candidacy, where he called on his fascist supporters to join a “great battle”—that is, a new January 8.

The PT’s response was to assure the Brazilian population that Trump would not interfere in the elections, when the intervention was already under way. Now, Lula is betting on pressure from the Democratic Party—which surfaced in a recent letter from Bernie Sanders to Secretary of State Marco Rubio—for Washington to commit to recognizing the result. It is a political fraud. The Democratic Party funds the same war machine that is now turning against Latin America and offered no serious opposition to the invasion of Venezuela. It was also under Democratic administrations that the 1964 coup in Brazil was engineered and carried out.

Nothing has been resolved

The main illusion promoted in these elections by the PT, the union federations and the pseudo-left is that, despite all criticisms of the government, it is now necessary to unite around Lula to avoid the disaster of a return of the Bolsonaros. The record of the past four years exposes this claim as a farce.

In 2022, faced with the conspiracy of Bolsonaro and the military, the decisive sections of the ruling class regrouped around Lula to stabilize a regime in crisis. The Broad Front with the bankers, agribusiness and the traditional right-wing parties was the instrument of this operation. Since Lula took office, the government has repeatedly proclaimed the “victory of democracy” and assured the public that the worst had passed, only to be proven wrong shortly afterward, beginning with the January 8 insurrection.

The PT outsourced to the judiciary the task of containing fascism so as to preclude any mobilization of mass opposition that might escape its control and turn against the capitalist regime itself. It worked systematically to rehabilitate the image of the Armed Forces, the base of Bolsonaro’s fascist conspiracy, raising military spending to historic levels. It systematically diverted the attention of the masses concerned about the dictatorial threat and its history in the country, treating the 1964 coup and the dictatorship as a closed chapter. And it implemented

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austerity, privatizations and social attacks that strengthened the hand of the fascist forces.

The criminal conviction of Bolsonaro, along with senior officers who backed the coup, punished individuals but preserved the military as an institution and left the social roots of the conspiracy intact. His heir—politically inept and massively despised—has reached the prospect of a tie with Lula, and amnesty for the coup plotters is the common program of the entire right-wing opposition.

Military spokesmen in the press report that the High Command assesses that the election will not restore the credibility of the institutions and that there is no institutional way out in sight. In a republic where the military has arrogated to itself the role of arbiter since its founding, military intervention remains an option on the table for the ruling class.

The STF, chosen by the PT to resolve the crisis, has itself become a battlefield. The Master case exposed the ties of justices from rival factions of the court to a fraudulent banker who simultaneously financed Flávio Bolsonaro's circle and did business with figures linked to PT governments. The measures with which the ruling class tried to contain the crisis, by diverting attention from its social roots, accumulated tensions that are now exploding at this critical political juncture.

The electoral terrain expresses the decomposition of the bourgeois order. Court orders for the mass removal of social media posts are overturned and reinstated by rival justices within a matter of days. The PT lowers the level of its campaign to religious appeals and hypocritical corruption accusations. Candidates flee from debates. The political system can no longer sustain even a facade of democracy.

Growing class struggle

Behind this decomposition lie deep social antagonisms. The regime built on basis of the 1988 Constitution was the bourgeoisie's response to the mass strikes that brought down the dictatorship, and the PT and its unions were for decades the main mechanism for containing the class struggle. That mechanism is exhausted.

Bank workers, postal workers, teachers and metalworkers are on strike, in a direct clash with the Lula government and with the courts that are acting to break their struggles. The same union federations that isolate these strikes are campaigning for Lula's reelection. The appeals of big capital for the preservation of "social peace" in the face of the STF crisis—expressed in a manifesto by Fiesp (São Paulo Federation of Industry) and other employers' organizations in defense of the court's legitimacy—reveal what the ruling class truly fears: that indignation over the rot of the institutions will fuse with a revolt against austerity. The postponement of a confrontation with capitalism—proposed by the unions and the pseudo-left parties that support Lula's Broad Front—only emboldens the proponents of fascism and dictatorship.

Throughout Latin America and internationally, the working-class movement is gathering strength. The brutality of the far-right regimes in the region is proportional to their fragility. Unpopular, corrupt and without a social base of their own, they depend on Washington and the repressive apparatus of the state.

The case of Fernando Cerimedo, business partner of Trump's former campaign chief, exposes the rot of the network that helped install them. A propagator of the fraudulent narrative that fueled January 8 in Brazil, he worked on the electoral operations of Milei in Argentina, Asfura in Honduras, Kast in Chile and De la Espriella in Colombia, and became the main adviser to Rodrigo Paz in Bolivia—where he is now jailed for ordering an assassination attempt and is under investigation for ties to drug trafficking. These same governments already face mass uprisings against their policies of attacks on social and democratic rights.

The political situation in Brazil and across the region contains grave threats to workers and youth. But a serious confrontation with reality should not encourage despair. The degree of crisis of the bourgeois political order is an expression of the magnitude of the historic challenges that the working class is called upon, and has the objective power to resolve. It is today the majority social force in Latin America, concentrated in large metropolises and integrated into world production. Its uprising against this rotten social order is developing in step with a movement of the international working class against capitalism and its politics of austerity, war and repression.

For the independent political mobilization of the working class

This developing movement finds no expression in these elections or in the decaying bourgeois political systems, in Brazil and around the world. The massive rejection of the two main candidates is the distorted expression of the chasm separating masses of working people from the entire system of capitalist rule. The pseudo-left serves the function of trying to close it. From the Socialism and Liberty Party (PSOL), which is part of the government, to the groups that are launching their own candidacies in order to return to Lula's camp in the runoff, all of its variants shackle workers to the PT, to the union bureaucracy and to the bourgeois national state.

Regardless of the results at the polls, the coming period will be one of sharpening crisis and workers must prepare by breaking politically with the PT, the union federations and the pseudo-left that revolves around them. This requires building rank-and-file committees, independent of and in opposition to the union bureaucracy, linked internationally through the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC). It requires uniting the struggle of Brazilian workers with those of their class brothers and sisters throughout Latin America, in the United States and internationally against imperialism, fascism and war. And it requires the adoption of 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.

The decisive task is to build the Socialist Equality Party (PSI) as the Brazilian section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, the world party of socialist revolution. We call on workers and young people seeking a way out of this crisis to join us.

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