

# Brazil stages presidential runoff amid global eruption of class struggle

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On Sunday, October 25, Brazilians return to the polls for the second round of the presidential election. On one side is President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva of the Workers Party (PT), running for reelection at the head of the so-called Broad Front (Frente Ampla). On the other is Senator Flávio Nantes Bolsonaro of the Liberal Party (PL), eldest son of the fascist former president Jair Messias Bolsonaro, who is serving a 27-year prison sentence for his attempted coup d'état. Flávio finished ahead in the first round, with 47 percent of the valid votes against 45.2 percent for Lula.

The election takes place amid an eruption of the class struggle on a world scale, whose most concentrated expression is today in France, where on October 17, more than 550,000 high school students, “yellow vests” and workers marched against the rising cost of living, cuts to education and police repression. In Washington, Donald Trump described the protests as a “full-on revolution” that must be violently suppressed.

The French explosion is part of a wave of protests and strikes against war, austerity and repression sweeping Europe. The same wave extends to Latin America: from healthcare workers in Mexico to the national strike in Colombia, from Argentine public employees to Chilean miners and the protests against diesel price increases in Bolivia, repressed with troops.

The IMF has declared cuts to public spending “urgent” on a global scale. Imposing this program on a working class that refuses to accept it requires dictatorial forms of rule, and to this end the world bourgeoisie is nurturing fascist forces everywhere.

## A common program of attack on the working class

In Brazil too, it is what the bourgeoisie perceives as a public debt crisis that dictates the terms of the election. In the 12 months to June, the state’s nominal deficit reached 9.99 percent of GDP, the highest since the pandemic, driven by interest payments of 1.16 trillion reais, equivalent to 8.8 percent of GDP. An enormous share of the wealth produced by the working class is transferred directly to bondholders.

The financial elite leaves no doubt about what it demands of the next government. The financial press is already listing the measures expected for 2027: de-linking pensions and social assistance benefits from the minimum wage and decoupling health and education spending from tax revenues. This is a direct attack on the living conditions of tens of millions of workers, retirees and poor people, and the fear of a recession only makes this demand more imperative.

Both bourgeois candidates present themselves as executors of this program. Flávio Bolsonaro promises a *tesouração*—a sweeping cut with the scissors—inspired by the “chainsaw” of Argentine President Javier Milei. His program calls for a fiscal adjustment of 1.5 percent of GDP, a debt ceiling, the elimination of 10 ministries and a constitutional amendment imposing austerity at the start of his term. Behind the scenes, his team has

already discussed ending real increases in pensions.

Lula offers the same program in a form calculated precisely to avoid provoking a social explosion. In his first official statement after the first round, he declared that no one in the country has the “moral authority to talk about fiscal policy” to him and to his vice president, Geraldo Alckmin. Lula and his Broad Front propose no confrontation with this program of capitalist attacks; they seek to manage it as effectively as possible.

## A shift to the right of Brazil’s entire political system

With the sizable lead he obtained in the first round, Flávio could dispense with the most open coup threats in recent weeks. They have not disappeared. The candidate has announced that he intends to amend the Constitution to “redemocratize” Brazil, a proposal he repeated in the presidential debate, linking it to the fight against crime and to lowering the age of criminal responsibility. An electoral defeat for Flávio would not end the fascist threat. Everything indicates that it would be accompanied by a violent challenge to the results—a repetition, at a higher level, of January 8, 2023—this time under far more explosive conditions and in a Latin America marked by the increasingly direct and violent intervention of US imperialism.

In recent weeks, internal conversations at Meta, owner of Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp, obtained by *Folha de S.Paulo*, exposed company employees acknowledging that Lula’s account was restricted compared to Flávio’s. On this basis, the PT campaign asked the Superior Electoral Court (TSE) to annul the Bolsonarista candidacy for “algorithmic manipulation.” Far from a “technical glitch,” as the company claims, the episodes indicate that central sections of the US capitalist oligarchy are determined to promote a new Bolsonaro government in Brazil.

On October 20, the fascist president of Argentina, Javier Milei, a self-declared ally of the Bolsonaro family, shared a clip of a Lula interview on social media, called the Brazilian president a “thief” and wrote that he hoped his latest campaign trick “does not include stealing the election.” The insinuation of fraud is no improvisation. Milei was already advancing this scenario in July, when he spoke at the launch of Flávio’s candidacy. It is a strategy that is in direct continuity with the conspiracy led by Jair Bolsonaro and the military high command in the 2022 elections, which culminated in the fascist assault in Brasília on January 8, 2023. Speaking in July, Milei left no room for doubt: “You already saw this four years ago, in the last presidential elections, and you will see it again. Get ready. Because the left has no problem playing dirty. Get ready for a great battle.”

The response of the PT and its Broad Front to these developments

followed the same reactionary course, deepening its shift to the right throughout the second-round campaign. On October 15, in an interview with *Jornal Nacional*, Lula declared himself in favor of lowering the age of criminal responsibility from 18 to 16 for heinous crimes, a hobby horse of the far right that the PT itself opposed for decades. At the same time, he made the Public Security Constitutional Amendment (PEC), which toughens sentences for members of criminal factions and restricts temporary prison leave and sentence progression, one of his main campaign banners, under the slogan “For the criminal, prison.”

The campaign came to revolve around Geraldo Alckmin—former governor of São Paulo and, for three decades, one of the main leaders of the Brazilian Social Democracy Party (PSDB), the traditional right-wing party that the PT faced in every presidential election from 1994 to 2014. Lula presented him as the man who understands fiscal adjustment and began considering appointing him finance minister to win the confidence of the markets. The PT’s latest campaign broadcast features Gen. Carlos Alberto dos Santos Cruz, Bolsonaro’s former chief minister of the Government Secretariat, and the slogan: “If you’re on the left, vote 13; if you’re on the right, vote 13”—13 being the PT’s ballot number. Alckmin added: “Right or left, we are all Brazilians.” The message is unmistakable. For the PT, this is not a contest between right and left, but a campaign “for Brazil,” in which the agenda of the right is presented as legitimate and the Broad Front claims for itself the task of carrying it out.

This shift was combined with the way the PT responded to the large mobilizations of recent weeks against the Bolsonaros’ return to power. Many of those who took to the streets were driven by a legitimate opposition to fascism and imperialism, and the PT called the rallies precisely because it felt the pressure of layers demanding a more combative response from Lula’s campaign. The lead-up to the runoff further exposed the false conception behind these rallies: that the Broad Front is the necessary path to fight fascism.

The PT and its pseudo-left satellites led the forces mobilized by its campaign toward an emptying out of any political understanding of the crisis and any preparation for a mass struggle against capitalism and the rise of fascism. The campaign’s actions were oriented exclusively toward “flipping votes,” appropriating the icons and banners of the far right and a reactionary nationalism, and using the threat of a Flávio Bolsonaro victory as blackmail to subordinate young people to the Broad Front.

## What is the PT’s Broad Front?

The Broad Front was born as the electoral coalition formed around Lula’s candidacy in 2022. Presented as a “democratic” and “antifascist” alliance, its real content was the unity of the main factions of the Brazilian bourgeoisie to contain the crisis of their regime and block an independent path for the working class. Its core was the Lula–Alckmin ticket, with Alckmin brought in as guarantor of the alliance with national and foreign capital. It extended far beyond the PSDB, openly courting sections of Bolsonaro’s governing coalition, which, moreover, had been part of the base of the PT governments for nearly a decade. Its birth certificate was the “Letters for Democracy,” spearheaded by no change

In 2026, the Broad Front advanced further in this direction, incorporating forces that, four years ago were in the right-wing opposition to Lula. Soraya Thronicke, elected in 2018 as “Bolsonaro’s senator” and the presidential candidate of União Brasil in 2022, competing for the same far-right electorate, joined Alckmin’s Brazilian Socialist Party (PSB) in April, in a move arranged by Lula, to seek reelection with his support. That same month, Rodrigo Pacheco, former president of the Senate, who came from the traditional right, joined the PSB to boost Lula’s candidacy

in Minas Gerais. With them came Josué Gomes da Silva, an industrialist and former president of FIESP.

The political essence of the PT’s Broad Front is rooted in the treacherous tradition of Stalinist popular frontism. Analyzing the Spanish Popular Front in *The Lessons of Spain: The Last Warning*, in 1937, Trotsky summed it up: “The modern history of bourgeois society is filled with all sorts of Popular Fronts, i.e., the most diverse political combinations for the deception of the toilers. The Spanish experience is only a new and tragic link in this chain of crimes and betrayals.”

The role played by the PT’s Broad Front corresponds exactly to what Trotsky described. By presenting Alckmin as someone with the “moral authority to talk about fiscal policy” and by embracing the repressive agenda of the far right, from lowering the age of criminal responsibility to “For the criminal, prison,” Lula offers the bourgeoisie what it seeks in Flávio. The task of the leaders of the Spanish republican bourgeoisie, Trotsky explained, consisted in checking the revolution of the masses and thus in regaining the lost confidence of the exploiters: “Why do you need Franco if we, the republicans, can do the same thing?”

There is, however, an essential difference. The popular fronts of the 20th century had at their center mass workers parties with treacherous leaderships—Social Democracy and the Stalinist Communist Parties—which dragged millions of workers behind the bourgeoisie. The PT no longer has this character. Over four decades, it has been transformed from a party based on unions that organized the mass economic struggles of the Brazilian working class into a party of capital, fully integrated into the bourgeois state. This trajectory is inscribed in its own presidential tickets. As early as 1989, Lula chose as his running mate José Paulo Bisol, one of the founders of the PSDB; in 2002, the textile magnate José Alencar—Josué Gomes’s father—chosen together with the “Letter to the Brazilian People” to reassure the financial markets; in 2022, Alckmin, the PT’s greatest historical adversary in São Paulo. The Broad Front is not an alliance of a workers’ party with the bourgeoisie but a combination of bourgeois forces whose specific function is to use the PT’s historical authority to contain the working class.

For this reason, no struggle against fascism can be waged through this Broad Front. The masses correctly see it as the supreme expression of the bourgeois political “system,” and the PT has assumed the role of linchpin of a bourgeois regime in crisis. The fascists benefit from this rejection, cynically presenting themselves as “anti-system”—which they are not. Every concession to the agenda of the right and every attack carried out in the name of “fiscal responsibility” deepens the disillusionment upon which the far right feeds.

## The struggles ahead

The social force capable of defeating fascism, however, is already in motion. On the eve of the first round, strikes by bank workers, postal workers, teachers and metalworkers were spreading across the country against the policies of the Lula government. These struggles have continued to develop in the midst of the election campaign.

This week alone, a series of new strikes erupted across different sectors and regions of the country. Bus drivers in the southern zone of São Paulo walked off the job on October 19 in an action organized outside the union, affecting transportation for 267,000 passengers, to demand overdue payments into their FGTS severance fund and INSS social security accounts. The city government responded by firing three drivers and stationing the Municipal Civil Guard in the garages; a new strike has already been announced for October 26, the day after the election. In Macapá, the capital of Amapá state, bus drivers ended a week-long strike.

At the GV do Brasil steel mill in Pindamonhangaba, 1,000 metalworkers walked out against a proposal with no real wage increase. In Cubatão, some 300 outsourced oil workers went on strike over unpaid overtime and benefits at Petrobras's Presidente Bernardes Refinery. Workers at the Vita hospitals in Curitiba waged a strike of more than a week over late wages.

These strikes are the first expressions of much broader struggles that are approaching, regardless of who wins on Sunday. The program the bourgeoisie demands for 2027—the dismantling of pensions, social benefits and spending on healthcare and education—is the same one that drove French youth and workers into the streets, and its imposition will require increasingly authoritarian forms of rule, whether under Flávio or under the Broad Front.

Brazil's political crisis is part of an objectively revolutionary crisis of world capitalism. It poses before the working class not the task of reforming the bourgeois state but of taking political power. This requires establishing its political independence from the Broad Front and all forces of the national bourgeoisie, organizing its struggles in rank-and-file committees independent of the union bureaucracy, linked internationally through the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), and building the revolutionary leadership capable of leading them based on the program of permanent revolution and international socialism: the Socialist Equality Group (Grupo Socialista pela Igualdade—GSI), which is fighting to build the Brazilian section of the International Committee of the Fourth International.



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