



# Brazil: Neo-fascist Bolsonaro on the verge of victory

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The massive political and trade union movements of Brazil's industrial workers, landless farmers and poor in the shantytowns, (favelas) face a deadly danger; the election of a semi-fascist, Jair Bolsonaro. He scored 49 million votes in the first round of the presidential elections, 46 per cent of the total, as against Fernando Haddad, the candidate of the Workers' Party, PT, who gained 31 million votes or 29 per cent. Without the solid support of the North East, where Haddad won 8 of the 9 states, Bolsonaro would have won outright in the first round.

Bolsonaro's rise has been spectacular. His Social Liberal Party, PSL, has also won 52 seats in the lower house, making it the second biggest party after the PT with 57 seats. In the 2014 legislative elections, it had only one seat in the lower house. Boosted into a media hero by the assassination attempt on him during his campaign, Bolsonaro is backed by extreme right forces in the military who he courted by praising the country's brutal military dictators who ruled the country from the 1960s to the 1980s.

For long regarded as just a right wing maverick, Bolsonaro has issued regular threats of violence against the workers' leaders and engaged in the foulest demagoguery and hate speech against his black and mixed race countrymen and women, as well as against gays and indigenous peoples. This played well with a mass following amongst the privileged white middle class, especially in the Evangelical Christian churches. This social base is bitterly resentful of the limited reforms that PT presidents Lula da Silva and, to a lesser extent, Dilma Rousseff, enacted between 2002 and 2016.

The PT's rule was ended by a 'legal' coup carried out by the Senate and Rousseff's vice president Michel Temer on 31 August 2016. Since then, Brazil has been in turmoil with regular mass demonstrations and one day general strikes and the country has failed to recover significantly from the economic collapse of 2014; growth was only 1 per cent in 2017-18. Resistance campaigns were organised by the PT and its associated mass formations like the Landless Workers' Movement, MST, and the trade union federation, CUT, as well as Brazil's significant far left parties like the Party of Liberation and Socialism, P-Sol.

However, to protest against a coup like Temer's but to hold back the masses from overthrowing him and the bourgeois parties and judges who supported him, has led to a situation where the forces of the right are determined to crush and pulverise the workers' and popular movement. They have no democratic inhibitions like the PT leaders, knowing that the Brazilian state machine is theirs and can be relied on to do their bidding.

Their aim is to install a savage regime of privatisation and neoliberal destruction of the social gains and trade union rights made over a third of a century. Women's, indigenous, landless and gay rights, and their defenders, will all come under attack.

Bolsonaro's main economic advisor, Paulo Guedes, former investment banker at Bozano Investimentos Ltd, having begun his career at the Chicago School of Economics, has said Brazil should privatise everything from the Banco do Brasil to the national oil company, Petróleo Brasileiro SA. 'Sell it all,' he said in an interview with Reuters, 'Privatising cautiously, bashfully, just won't do.'

In the second round, Fernando Haddad is now the only candidate who can stop Bolsonaro, but it is likely, indeed certain, that he will pursue the old PT strategy of cobbling together an alliance with pseudo-social democratic and even outright bourgeois parties of the centre and the centre right, around the idea of 'saving democracy'. This is the old

?popular front? strategy for defeating fascism, which has been deployed with disastrous consequences, in 1936-9 in Spain and in Chile in 1973 for example. Temer himself was just such an ally!

The price such "allies" would demand is to abandon the feeble reformist programme and adopt theirs. Haddad has immediately stated: "I have complete tranquility in adjusting programme parameters so that it is the most representative of this broad Democratic alliance that we intend to make."

Whilst the working class never rejects the aid of other classes and their parties in a struggle to defend its vital interests, the emphasis must be on actual struggle on the streets and in the workplaces. The odds are stacked heavily against Haddad on the electoral terrain since it is likely the bourgeois parties will be more influenced by Bolsonaro's programme of looting the state industries and putting the workers and the poor on iron rations than by his threats to democracy. Internationally, whilst the Economist has warned of the danger of Bolsonaro, the Financial Times is much more circumspect, eyeing his neoliberal reforms with favour. For sure, Trump will not condemn a semi-fascist regime in Brazil.

Despite the adverse electoral situation, on the field of the class struggle all is far from lost. The unions and parties of the workers and peasants can still mobilise their millions to block the road to fascism or any return to military rule. Any democratic mandate for Bolsonaro will be the result of a gigantic fraud. Brazilian democracy was undermined long before the election by the parliamentary coup and by the judicial prevention of Lula's candidacy and his imprisonment.

Bolsonaro's following is still far from being an organised fascist movement that can stand up to the working class and the rural poor, unless the latter remain passive or paralysed by their reformist leaderships. Obviously, the existing fascist groups and the armed thugs of the employers and landowners can provide the cadres for such a movement but the pampered petit bourgeoisie will quail before a determined proletarian resistance.

Nor, whatever the reactionary appetites of its commanders, have the armed forces been won to taking over responsibility not only for the ailing economy but for suppressing a huge workers' movement. Everything depends on the working class mobilising its forces and showing its determination not to lose its rights or its social gains without a bitter struggle. Such determination will likely fragment the bourgeois forces and make some of them think twice.

So what can be done in the weeks before the second round on 28 October? Before the first round, our co-thinkers in Brazil had already spelt it out:

?We in the Socialist League have argued that left-wing parties need to build a united front to face the coup and reactionary right, and also to defeat the combination of military bonapartism and fascism, whose leader is Bolsonaro. ?We have to organise working class resistance by creating committees at workplaces, schools, neighbourhoods not just for voting, but for the ongoing struggle for our rights and democratic freedoms.?

The world working class movement must actively aid our brothers and sisters in Brazil. The one and a half million members of the PT, its allied organisations and its tens of millions of voters, are the major force of our class in Latin America and one of the strongest in the world. A historic defeat for them would throw the global balance of forces still further to the right. It would encourage the forces of reaction in other countries to similar acts, just as the defeat in Chile in 1973 did. The labour movements in Europe and North America, in Africa and Asia, must render all assistance possible to the Brazilian workers and do all we can prevent our own governments from supporting Bolsonaro.

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