

Brazil's Workers Party drops Lula as candidate for president

By Miguel Andrade
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On Tuesday, September 11, Brazil's Workers Party (Partido dos Trabalhadores—PT) formally withdrew the presidential candidacy of jailed former President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva—known universally as Lula—substituting in his place the former right-wing mayor of São Paulo, Fernando Haddad.

The move was a recognition by the PT that it would be impossible to place Lula's name on the ballot in next month's presidential election, given his conviction on money laundering and passive corruption charges stemming from the Lava Jato investigation into the vast bribery and kickback operation centered on the state-run energy conglomerate Petrobras. Lula is now serving a 12-year sentence.

On August 31, Brazil's Electoral Court (TSE) ruled that the former president, who governed Brazil from 2003 to 2010, was ineligible to run under the so-called "Ficha Limpa" (clean slate) law that Lula himself signed while in power and the PT supported. The statute prohibits politicians with criminal convictions upheld by an appeals court to run in elections. The TSE had set Tuesday as the deadline for the PT selecting another candidate.

The replacement of Lula—who had been placed first in the polls when listed as a potential candidate—by Haddad, who until this week registered just 4 percent support, is the latest shakeup in a crisis-ridden run-up to the October 7 vote in the country of over 207 million people.

The replacement of the PT candidate follows on the heels of the assassination attempt against the current front-runner, the fascist army reserve captain and federal legislator Jair Bolsonaro who was stabbed during a campaign rally in Minas Gerais last Thursday by a man who told police he had been told by God to carry out the attack. Bolsonaro, who remains in intensive care after the attack, has seen a slight sympathy bump in the polls, with one showing his support increasing from 26 to 30 percent.

While the barring of Lula's candidacy had been viewed as a foregone conclusion in Brazilian ruling circles, a brief controversy erupted over an August 17 statement by the United Nations Human Rights Committee calling upon Brazil "to take all necessary measures to ensure that Lula can enjoy and exercise his political rights while in prison, as candidate in the 2018 presidential elections."

Although the note clearly stated that "this request does not mean that the Committee has found a violation yet" in his trial, it generated anxiety for suggesting that the *Ficha Limpa* law could be in violation of international law.

Predominant factions within the ruling elite had already been incensed by the highly ambiguous case of the rosary brought to Lula in prison in early June by Vatican official Juan Grabois, which the PT praised as a gesture of political support from Pope Francis, and the support for Lula's candidacy, as well as his claim of being a political prisoner, by various imperialist officials. Since his arrest order in April, these have included, most prominently, former French President François Hollande, former Spanish Prime Minister Jose Luis Zapatero and, most recently, the former leader of German Social Democracy, Martin Schulz, who declared to *Deutsche Welle* in Curitiba, where Lula is serving his sentence, that he had come "at request of the Party leader Andreas Nahles" after having discussed the matter with Foreign Minister Heiko Maas.

The right-wing reaction to these events highlights the sharp turn to the right take by Brazil's entire political system. Newspaper editorials and opinion pages have become increasingly reminiscent of the rants against "international interference" made by Brazil's 1964-1985 military junta and similar regimes across Latin America over human rights reports. The country's oldest newspaper, *O Estado de S. Paulo*, charged the *New York Times* with "inexplicably aiding" Lula's "international campaign to defame Brazilian institutions" by publishing his open letter of August 14, while the UN human rights panel's statement prompted Bolsonaro to deliver a Trump-like rant vowing that he would "withdraw" Brazil from the United Nations.

On September 3, in an interview with the financial daily *Valor Econômico*, Brazilian Foreign Minister Aloysio Nunes charged "the main media of the US and Europe" with spreading "PT propaganda." And an *O Estado de S. Paulo* editorial from September 4 furiously called the PT's decision to renew its appeal of the TSE ruling to the UN "an assault on Brazilian sovereignty."

Most ominous of all, however, was *O Estado de S. Paulo's* interview with the chief of the Brazilian armed forces, Gen. Eduardo Villas Boas, who declared that Lula's candidacy would be unacceptable to the military and denounced the UN Human Rights Committee statement as "an attempted invasion of Brazilian sovereignty."

General Villas Boas told the newspaper that Lula's succeeding in overcoming the *Ficha Limpa* law and winning the election could threaten the "stability and governability" of Brazil, increasing the division of Brazilian society, and "directly implying our action, as in the case of the truckers strike."

Under these conditions, the PT's "Free Lula" campaign has been the main vehicle for the party's overtures to business circles the world over to recognize the usefulness of Lula in maintaining class peace in Brazil. It has appealed to the reactionary forces of "democratic imperialism," such as the Democratic Party in the United States, the Socialist Party in France and the German Social Democracy, which are engaged in relentless militarism abroad and censorship and the normalization of the far-right at home, in order to violently confront increasing working class militancy.

Recent developments have only accelerated this drive, raising the most serious issues are for the working class. What is required is a conscious and relentless exposure of the fraudulent "Free Lula" campaign by the PT and the pseudo-left organizations surrounding it.

The *Ficha Limpa* law itself was the opening shot of a sharp turn to the right by the PT that alienated decisive sections of the working class in major PT power bases in the industrial regions of the country. This prompted the ruling class to desert the PT and bring down President Dilma Rousseff in the 2016 impeachment, which was met with indifference by workers after her government had conceded to the right wing on every major issue, from austerity measures to the privatization of the state-run oil giant Petrobras.

The PT reacted to the 2016 impeachment of Rousseff by blocking, through the collaboration of the CUT trade union federation, any attempt by workers to fight against the acceleration of austerity measures, as this would send the ruling class the "wrong signal" about the PT's willingness to return to power and continue the war on workers' living standards.

Despite its populist phraseology, the "Free Lula" campaign is saturated with contempt toward and, in the case of its most sycophantic leaders, hatred for, the working class, which they see as responsible for the rise of the far right.

A bourgeois party, the PT looks not to the masses of Brazilian workers, but rather to the imperialist powers as a base of support for its return to power. Thus, the party's sycophantic mouthpiece, *Brasil247*, carried a leading article titled "German association warns multinational corporations: don't invest in a fascist Brazil"—a reference to a possible victory by Bolsonaro.

On August 22, 2017, *Brasil247* celebrated the nervousness within Brazilian ruling circles over the exclusion of Brazil from US Vice President Mike Pence's first Latin American tour with the headline "[financial daily] *Valor*: With Temer Brazil has become a global pariah." From the impeachment on, the party has seized upon pieces in *Le Monde*, the *Financial Times* and the *New York Times* warning the Brazilian ruling class that Lula is a precious political asset as a vindication of its policies.

On September 1, after the barring of Lula's candidacy, *Brasil247* interviewed Gilberto Maringoni, a former PT member and leader of the PSOL (the Socialism and Liberty Party, within which the Morenoites and Pabloites operate). He put the issues at stake for the PT in the clearest class terms, saying that the foreign policy of the current government of Michel Temer represented "a 100-year regression" from the "successful" plan envisioned by the monarchist founder of Brazilian diplomacy in the early twentieth century in which US dictates to Latin America "would have to be

mediated by Brazil as the leading regional power."

In face of these right-wing professions of faith by innumerable self-proclaimed socialists, one must ask: What would be the reaction of a new PT government to an explosion of working class struggle that challenged the interests of imperialism? Only one answer is conceivable: the most ferocious repression.

These forces, whose social base is the bourgeoisie and the upper middle classes, blame the working class for the loss of an international position "never before reached" by Brazil, in Maringoni's words. They are abandoning their "left-opposition" pretensions adopted in relation to the Lula administration after the founding of PSOL in July 2004.

Their frustration with the working class is giving way to the most naked class hatred, as expressed in the writings of *El País*'s Eliane Brum on the last major eruption of working class struggle in Brazil, the May truckers' strike. Brum had written that Lula was intolerable for the ruling class because "the social programs and affirmative action of the PT ended up threatening" class conciliation in Brazil ("Lula, the irreconcilable," April 11).

On May 4, she wrote that right-wing demands for a military intervention seen among some of the truckers had "predictably channeled" resentments over "masculinity threatened by growing LGBT and women protagonism." She concluded that "there was nothing more symbolic" of these supposed sentiments "than the aggressive image of trucks in a world that needs to reduce carbon emissions" and that the most underestimated effect of the strike was the decrease in pollution in the city of São Paulo.

This neo-Malthusian rhetoric is the language of class hatred of the promoters of the "free Lula" campaign, for whom the biggest threat is posed not by the far right, but by the working class.

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