

# The Long Brazilian Crisis: A Forum

Monday 8 July 2019, by [ABILIO Ludmila](#), [ANTUNES Ricardo](#), [FERNANDES Sabrina](#), [GRIGERA Juan](#), [MATTOS Marcelo Badaró](#), [NUNES Ricardo](#), [PAULANI Leda](#), [PURDY Sean](#), [TROTTE Kelsey](#), [WEBBER Jeffery R.](#) (Date first published: 1 April 2019).

**The coming to office of Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil has brought to the fore the need to understand the rise of the far right and to come to terms with the conflicted legacies of more than a decade of rule under the Workers' Party. This forum brings together six leading intellectuals from different traditions on the left and introduces their reflections on the contradictions and complexities of the Workers' Party, the 2008 crisis, the June 2013 protests, the weakness of the Brazilian left, corruption, and on how to characterise Bolsonaro's regime. Their interventions offer crucial insights that are relevant today not just to Brazil, or even Latin America, but to the politics of the left worldwide.**

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## Introduction

Brazil has returned to the world headlines, this time because Jair Bolsonaro, a grotesque and until-now marginal, far-right politician, won 55.7 per cent of the vote in the second-round general elections in October 2018. Perhaps most striking about this latest triumph of reaction is that it took place in the world's fifth largest country by area and population, and in the sixth largest economy. What is more, Bolsonaro's ascent comes on the heels of 14 years of rule by the Workers' Party (Partido dos Trabalhadores, PT) – one of the most mature and institutionalised social-democratic parties of the twenty-first century. With this symposium, *Historical Materialism* historically and theoretically situates the current Brazilian conjuncture and contributes to the debate within the left on the international impact of these events, inviting further reflection on the moment of danger opening up before us.

The victory of Bolsonaro brings to a close a series of political manoeuvres and manipulations by the Brazilian right and centre, designed to reverse the modestly reformist legacy of the PT government, and particularly the two administrations of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, or Lula (2003–10). The parliamentary coup of 2016, which ousted Lula's presidential successor, Dilma Rousseff, or Dilma (also of the PT), was the inaugural act of this retrogressive drama, allowing Michel Temer, Dilma's vice-president-turned-foe, to step in as placeholder president until the latest elections.

During the 2018 campaign, Lula once again assumed the mantle of the PT's leadership and was leading the polls by a significant margin when arrested and imprisoned under dubious charges of corruption. Lula had lost the support of the Brazilian ruling class as far back as the popular uprising of June 2013, which was catalysed initially by left-wing social movements fighting

transferring increases and the redirection of public revenue toward the World Cup and away from social services, but was eventually captured by conservative political forces and their allies in the mainstream media. Fragmentary political forces on the right and centre managed to cohere behind a shared banner of anti-corruption, an old card of the traditional Brazilian elite, played repeatedly throughout the late twentieth century; the US-backed military removal of João Goulart in 1964 was, for example, a dress rehearsal in this sense for the impeachment of Dilma and the jailing of Lula. The straightforwardly political character of the judiciary's bold move against Lula was but the latest and most lucid exhibition of the extraordinary – if temporary – unity achieved by the Brazilian ruling class in its collective opposition to any renewal of Lula's PT.

While Lula himself remained popular even after his incarceration, support for the PT had been in decline for years. The party was simultaneously unable and unwilling to mobilise extra-parliamentary forces to counter the extra-constitutional tactics of a reinvigorated Brazilian right. The ruling party between 2002 and 2015, the PT had long since departed from its trade-unionist and social-movement origins. Indeed, its decade and a half in government witnessed the debilitation of independent class struggle from below, including even the demobilisation of social movements closely allied with the PT, such as the Landless Rural Workers' Movement (Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem Terra, MST) and the Unified Workers' Central (Central Única dos Trabalhadores, CUT).

The seemingly precipitous breakdown of the twenty-first century's posterchild for social-democratic viability had, in fact, been some time in the making. Its unravelling began somewhere between 2012 and 2013. The first crack was economic, as the international environment deteriorated in the slow wake of the global crisis of 2008, which reached Brazilian shores in 2012 via the collapse in international commodity prices. In the midst of those deteriorating conditions, Dilma marked the beginning of her second term in office with the appointment of a neoliberal banker, Joaquim Levy, to the finance ministry. The party's wager that it could survive the implementation of austerity measures was ill-conceived, inducing as it did the dual alienation of its erstwhile social base among the popular classes – who witnessed the livelihood gains of the last decade being clawed back – and of foreign and domestic capital – which had learned to live with the PT while it was profitable to do so, but which saw Dilma's monetarist turn as encompassing too little, too late. The second fissure was political. Here, the aforementioned rebellions of 2013 drove a further wedge between the PT and the popular class forces which were behind the relatively spontaneous expression of growing discontent, while at the same time providing an opportunity for right-wing re-articulation.

The social struggles engulfing Brazilian political life in recent years are unlikely to recede under Bolsonaro's watch. The spiral of legitimacy crises that undermined PT rule remained visible, indeed intensified, during Temer's short-lived, conservative interregnum. At one point, Temer's popularity rating fell to two per cent. Bolsonaro is unlikely to be able to resolve the underlying socio-economic and political determinants of widespread popular disillusionment with the country's politicians and established institutions. His hysterical association of the PT with 'communism' has proved to be temporarily effective, but he has neither a political strategy for governance, nor a means of reviving the Brazilian economy in the midst of worsening stagnation at the global level.

This forum brings together six leading intellectuals, representing a variety of left-traditions, with unique perspectives on the principal social forces behind the Brazilian crisis and its key tensions and synergies. Our conversation focuses on the contradictions and complexities of the PT era, the impact of the 2008 crisis and the end of the cycle of the commodity boom in 2012, on how to interpret the political dynamics of the June 2013 protests, on the weakness of the movements to the left of the PT, on how to understand and approach corruption from the left, and on how to explain and characterise Bolsonaro's regime. While it is impossible to present the full spectrum of Marxist debate on such questions, the contributions included here bring to light some of the crucial insights and

controversies that are relevant not just to Brazil, or even Latin America, but to left-politics worldwide.

## A Brief Timeline

- 2003–11: Lula's two terms in office.
- 2010: Dilma Rousseff is elected president, confirming the PT's success with a third term under a new leader.
- 2012: For most Latin American countries including Brazil, the exceptional terms of trade that began in 2002–3 start to decline or revert to levels previous to the boom.
- 2013: In June a protest against increases in transport prices in São Paulo leads to coordinated massive demonstrations in all major cities of Brazil, encompassing a broader agenda.
- 2014: Dilma is re-elected with a platform against neoliberalism, winning a tight race against Aécio Neves of the PSDB. During Dilma's inauguration she appoints Joaquim Levy, a neoliberal economist, as Finance Minister in what is perceived as a betrayal of her electoral campaign.
- 2015: Operation Lava Jato (Car Wash), a judicial investigation into a megacorruption scheme involving Petrobras, the state-owned oil company, looms large in Brazilian politics.
- 2015: The movements against Dilma and the PT accusing them of corruption pick up momentum.
- 2016: Dilma Rousseff is impeached for disregarding the Fiscal Responsibility Law. The Vice President in the coalition, Michel Temer (from the PMDB), takes office.
- 2017: Several cases of corruption against both Temer himself and his ministers go public.
- 2018: In March, Marielle Franco, a feminist city councillor from PSOL, is assassinated.
- 2018: Lula is arrested and imprisoned, and disallowed from running as the PT's presidential candidate due to dubious charges of corruption.
- 2018: Jair Bolsonaro defeats the PT candidate (Fernando Haddad) in the second round of the general election with 55 per cent of the votes.

## Forum

*1. Before we begin the substantive discussion of Brazil, could each of you briefly describe your political and intellectual formation?*

**Ludmila Abilio (LA):** I am a sociologist with a PhD (2011) in Social Sciences from UNICAMP, the State University of Campinas. I obtained my Bachelor's and Master's degrees from the University of São Paulo. That was when I became involved in student activism and the solidarity economy, in social programmes run by the city. My Master's research project focused on those programmes. My research goal was to examine the latest poverty-management strategies and their effects on beneficiaries' lives. That research then led me to my doctoral work, which focused on the informal sector. I studied door-to-door saleswomen of cosmetics working for a Brazilian company, *Natura* (currently totalling over 1.5 million employees). By means of an in-depth discussion on debates about the loss of the centrality of labour for capital accumulation, I dealt with the centrality of a typical women's job, often not even recognised as work. My research revealed to me the role of crowdsourcing, a term that had not yet even been coined, in the activity of that group of women working for a single company. In 2012, I was awarded a postdoctoral degree in Economics by the University of São Paulo after conducting a research project on motorcycle couriers in the city of São Paulo. My goal was to explore the working conditions of iconic workers of the 'new middle class' and the changes in their lives to reflect on the contradictions of the PT's administrations. I witnessed the changes in the organisation of labour brought about by the introduction of delivery applications.

Both projects led me to my current investigation into the Uberisation of work, the focus of my second postdoctoral research project, in Economics, now at UNICAMP's Institute of Economics.

This entire description was designed to show that my academic background was completely structured around my research studies on the pivotal role of socially invisible male and female workers in the development of the capitalist system in periphery countries. I am currently a researcher at UNICAMP's *Centro de Estudos Sindicais e Economia do Trabalho* (Centre of Labour Studies, CESIT), whose connection with social movements, unions and organisations has prompted me to engage with a lot of effect in the debate on the Uberisation of work and labour reform with activist groups and organisations. As a representative of CESIT, I am also a member of the Brazilian Senate's commission responsible for drafting a counterproposal to labour reform.

**Ricardo Antunes (RA):** I'm a Professor of Sociology at IFCH/UNICAMP (Brazil). I have also been a Visiting Research Fellow at the University of Sussex (England) and Visiting Professor at the University Ca' Foscari (Venice, Italy). I have facilitated conferences at different universities throughout Europe, the United States, Latin America, and Asia, and I received the Florestan Fernandes Professorship at Consejo Latinoamericano de Ciencias Sociales (Latin American Congress of Social Sciences, CLASCO) in 2002.

I began my intellectual and political formation in the 1970s. I participated in trade-union opposition movements and professors' unions. I collaborated with the CUT (1983-2003), and, most recently, I worked with the *Coordenação Nacional de Lutas* (National Coordinator of Struggles, CONLUTAS) and *Instrumento de Luta e Organização da Classe Trabalhadora* (Instrument of Struggle and Organisation of the Working Class, INTERSINDICAL). Politically, I was a founding member of the *Partido Socialismo e Liberdade* (Socialism and Freedom Party, PSOL) in 2004, and I remain a member. Previously, I was a militant in the *Partido Comunista Brasileiro* (Brazilian Communist Party, PCB) (1978-80) and a militant in the PT (1983-2003). I currently collaborate with MST, and I've been a professor at their Florestan Fernandes School since 1996.

Among other books, I've published *The Privilege of Servitude*, *The Meanings of Work*, and *Goodbye Work?* In addition, I regularly write articles for academic journals in different countries, and I'm contributing editor of *Latin American Perspectives* (United States), *Margem Esquerda* (Brazil) and a collaborating editor of *Herramienta* (Argentina), among others.

My research topics include labour sociology, social theory, the ontology of social beings, new labour morphology, the working class, collective action and consciousness, union movements, and labour movements.

**Marcelo Badaró Mattos (MB):** I'm a History Professor at Universidade Federal Fluminense, located in Niterói (state of Rio de Janeiro), Brazil. I completed my PhD in History at the same institution in 1996, and my research and publications focus mainly on labour history. Politically, I have been both an activist and part of the board of our national union (ANDES-SN) and its section in my university since the 1990s. I also took part in the foundation of PSOL, and was a member of the first national-executive board (2004-5). I am currently a member of Resistência (Resistance), a political group within PSOL.

**Sabrina Fernandes (SF):** I have a PhD in Sociology with Political Economy from Carleton University, in Canada, and I currently teach at the Department of Sociology of the University of Brasília, in Brazil. I identify as an activist within the radical left in Brazil, working primarily with demands concerning the environment, class-based feminism, the right to the city, and left-unity politics. This means that I have often criticised the moderate left, embodied by the Workers' Party, for their concessions around class conciliation in Brazil and the way the PT was willing to sacrifice

social and environmental rights throughout its time in government. That said, I refrain from the ultraleftist approaches in Brazil that tend to blame everything on the PT, leaving the radical left's own flaws unexamined.

**Ricardo Nunes (RN):** I was the youngest member of the student union at my school in 1992, and it was in that capacity that I participated in the protests which led to Fernando Collor's impeachment. I became involved in student politics again at university, while studying both law and philosophy. Although I've voted for PT and worked closely with party members several times, I've always preferred to keep a critical distance. There weren't many autonomists back then, so people had a hard time situating my comrades and me. We also did community organising and helped start popular cooperatives, so we set up an NGO to do that kind of work 'officially'.

From 2001 until 2005 I was heavily involved in the World Social Forum process and in organising the events in Porto Alegre. That was my initiation into the alterglobalist movement, and when I moved to the UK to do my PhD that was the type of politics I fitted into. That cycle had already started to wind down, however, and with some friends I started *Turbulence*, a journal whose purpose was to think through that transition and look for possible points of political recomposition. We went on from 2007 to 2010, so we quit just before a new cycle began; timing was perhaps not our forte! I was also a labour organiser in Unite's 'Justice for Cleaners' campaign for a year, working with the allmigrant cleaning workforce in the London Underground and in City buildings. The job included things like organising protests and holding meetings in Tube depots in the middle of the night, which was great. While the campaign ended underwhelmingly, it sparked several autonomous copycat initiatives and identified a cluster of excellent leaders who went on to create the independent 'Cleaners for Justice' group.

Parallel to that, I worked on a thesis on the concept of immanence that was quite abstract, although I often find that 'pure' conceptual work helps clarify political questions; my academic work tends to take place in this two-way movement between ontology and politics. I returned to Porto Alegre in 2010 for a post-doc, and participated somewhat peripherally in the struggles against the Belo Monte dam and of local communities affected by the upcoming World Cup. Those two things made the dark side of PT's developmentalism very clear to me, and the 2013 protests less of a surprise. People with my kind of political background were in a better position to make sense of June 2013, not only because we had been paying attention to the global cycle begun in 2011, but because many of its issues and practices were already familiar to us. While most were hearing about Movimento Passe Livre (Free Fare Movement, MPL) for the first time, some of us had been present at its first national plenary in 2005.

Right after the protests I moved back to my hometown of Rio de Janeiro to join the philosophy department at the Pontifical Catholic University (PUC-Rio). 2013 convinced me that I should abandon the more rarefied ontological questions I was then working on and focus on my present project, which is an attempt to thoroughly rethink the question of political organisation. Part of the motivation for that was the hope that it might be possible to at least spare the new generation of activists from making the same mistakes my generation made. This research has yielded a short book (*Organisation of the Organisationless*, 2014), and a second one is forthcoming with Verso.

**Leda Paulani (LP):** I'm an economist. I studied economics at the University of São Paulo (USP), where I earned my PhD. In the same university, I also studied media, with a specialisation in journalism. I am currently a professor in the Department of Economics of the Faculty of Economics, Business Administration and Accounting of the University of São Paulo (FEA-USP) and a researcher/visiting professor at the Federal University of ABC (UFABC). My main areas of research are Marxism, contemporary capitalism, the Brazilian economy and economic methodology. Although formally my training is almost entirely in the area of economics, I always work in an interdisciplinary

and critical way. I was the president of the Brazilian Society of Political Economy between 2004 and 2008. I was a member of the PT from its founding at the beginning of the 1980s, but I left in 2004. When Fernando Haddad was mayor of the city of São Paulo, I worked with him, acting as his Secretary of Planning, Budget and Management.

**Sean Purdy (SP):** I'm a Canadian social historian who teaches and writes about the history of workers' and social movements in the Americas, particularly the United States and Brazil. Since 2006, I've been a professor of the History of the Americas at the University of São Paulo. I've been an activist in union and social movements in Canada and Brazil for thirty years, and am currently an independent militant in the PSOL in Brazil. I've written extensively on Brazil's June Days of 2013 and the current political crisis in academic and political publications in both English and Portuguese.

*2. In order to understand the current Brazilian conjuncture, it is clearly necessary first to come to grips with the contradictions and complexities of the preceding era of Workers' Party (PT) rule. In broad strokes, how would you characterise the PT governments from 2003 to 2016?*

**LA:** Five years ago, it would have been easier to see and point out the contradictions and complexities of PT administrations. At that time, criticism could be clearly guided by the expectations concerning a party which was supposed to play its historical role of really representing workers' interests and needs. That would have meant bringing the labour-capital conflict to the centre of politics. But the PT has never really focused on this project, and we must admit that this became apparent even before it was elected. If we look at the official slogans of the PT's administrations, we will see that Brazil was becoming '*a good country for all*', that '*a rich country is one without poverty*'. Therefore, we can see a clear shift from conflict to compromise. In practice, we know what that means: poverty may be reduced, but not social inequality; the government will promote income growth, but in no way affect financial gains (in fact, those gains will set the limits for income distribution). This was the main complexity and contradiction of the PT's administrations. Capital and labour were put together on the same side in the battle against poverty.

This led to an unprecedented reduction of poverty while we inexplicably maintained one of the highest interest rates worldwide. Having to work under the umbrella of compromise, social movements faced a major challenge defining their own demands and practices. In a nutshell, we could say that the meaning of citizenship was distorted – it was much more oriented to social techniques of poverty management than to social conflict and the struggle for recognition. Of course, we must recall that there are different spheres of government, i.e., the federal government does not rule the country without municipal and state governments. However, those federal elements afford a general view of the main contradiction: those years were guided by 'social inclusion', which is far from tackling the issues of social inequality and Brazil's historical structures of power and exploitation. However, this does not mean that the PT failed to promote a very significant improvement in living conditions, especially in the poorest regions of the country. In fact, this was clearly reflected in the results of an extremely polarised election: most north-easterners voted for the PT whereas most southerners and south-easterners voted for Bolsonaro.

It is easy to see the labour-capital conflict simply being erased when you consider how the PT's administrations officially defined the millions of Brazilians that moved above the poverty line as 'the new middle class'. I spent some years exploring the work of motorcycle couriers in São Paulo, who could be considered iconic representatives of the so-called 'new middle class'. They did benefit from a growth in income, easier access to both credit and formal-sector jobs, and lower unemployment, but their working conditions continued deteriorating, with a normal working day of over 14 hours in very risky conditions. This is not a one-off example: longer working hours, work intensification, high turnover rates, transfer of risks and costs to workers all accompanied the earnings growth. It is worth noting that earnings have actually increased, but that the extremely uneven structure of the

labour market has remained basically unchanged. Blacks – especially black women – remain at the bottom, and much of the population still has low-skilled jobs and a low income.

We obviously should look at those contradictions from a broader perspective, considering the challenges posed by the flattened horizons of anticapitalism and the catastrophic recent victory of a financial-led regime.

After 2014, however, we have been brutally reminded that the left cannot govern as the left. The major social regression and change in policy direction has also led us to reassess our own criticisms of the PT to some extent, which also means narrowing the scope of criticism itself and building it on the ground of governability. Two years after the impeachment, a profound change has altered the very nature of labour law, one clearly against workers' interests, and there has been a sharp rise in the number of Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (Landless Workers' Movement, MST) militants killed, among many other events that clearly return Brazil to a contemporary colonial project. There is no doubt whatsoever that the nature of the government's project for the country has undergone a profound change since 2016. Therefore, the references for criticism have been shaken by the tidal wave headed toward us since 2016, and those waters seem much more navigable in hindsight.

**RA:** During the 1990s, Brazil experienced a period of 'neoliberal desertification'. When Lula won the election in 2002, the PT had already undergone a profound transformation. Brazil had been transforming itself during the neoliberal administrations of Collor and Fernando Henrique Cardoso (FHC), and the PT was no longer a party of the working class – the same party which had originally defended working-class political independence and autonomy.

Throughout the 1990s, the PT moderated its policies and practices and focused more on 'improving' the capitalist order instead of 'transforming' it. As a result of these metamorphoses, its administrations were more an *extension of* than a *breakaway from* neoliberalism, although it did focus more on social issues. For that reason, the PT's economic policies preserved (and increased) the interests of the dominant class segments (financial, industrial, commercial, and agribusiness).

Its main social programme, the *Bolsa-Família*, part of a wider welfare programme, sought to minimise poverty levels, especially in the less developed regions of Brazil. There was also a relative increase in salaries during the PT's administrations, and over 20 million jobs were created. But it's important to point out that the structural pillars of Brazilian poverty weren't adequately dealt with, and the traits of dependent and subordinate capitalism were maintained.

There are a lot of emblematic examples of this: land ownership continued to be highly concentrated, and agribusiness grew sharply. The banks' profits were high, and Lula said repeatedly (with the typical satisfaction of a *benefactor* government) that his administration had generated 'high profits for bankers'. It broadened the scope of international capital and incentivised the transnationalisation of important sectors of the Brazilian dominant class such as civil engineering. Incidentally, this phenomenon was vital to understanding the political crisis that hit the PT administration during the 'Mensalão' corruption scandal in 2005, and, later, Dilma Rousseff's impeachment in 2016. All of this laid the basis for the crisis. The coup, carried out by the grifter Michel Temer, clearly illustrated the superficiality of the changes enacted by the PT administration.

In her more-general economic policies, Dilma maintained Lula's policies: economic growth emphasising internal market expansion; incentivising production of *commodities* for exportation; tax cuts for big business (automotive production, household appliances, and civil engineering); and maintaining financial policies that were favourable for investment capital. Only during the brief period when the repercussions of the international crisis began to amplify in Brazil did Dilma's

administration practise policies reducing interest rates. But the serious discontent arising from the financial world made the Dilma administration quickly return to enacting high-interest policies. Without Lula's 'political genius of appeasement', and Dilma's politically unprepared attempt to reorganise the powers of office, the PT's decline was inevitable. During this time, Lula and Dilma's relationship reached its most difficult turning point. The administration's work and the appearance of change began to implode, and what had *de facto* protected the dominant class' main interests became what distanced the party further from its founding operational, union, and social principles. Such policies of appeasement caused the PT administration to implode.

**MB:** The PT governments could be generally characterised as implementing a weak reformist programme with the aim of transforming the form of class domination in Brazil into a class-conciliation model, after a decade of hard-core neoliberal governments in the 1990s. The trade balance was very favourable and international trade of commodities was increasing at the time – especially due to the growing role of China as Brazil's main trading partner. Therefore, it was possible to keep a combination of targeted social policies (like the 'Bolsa Família' programme, housing programmes, a real increase in the minimum wage and credit for low wagedworkers and pensioners) along with increasing profits, especially for banks, agribusiness and the ore and oil-extraction industry. In addition to these general lines, we should add the ability the PT governments had to control social movements. During its administrations, the PT worked hard to undermine the unions' powers of contestation and that of the social movements in general, seeking to use them as mere transmission belts for their government. They even came to the point of using the unions and social movements as barriers to keep back and contain the mobilisations of sectors of the working class that opposed certain government policies. In that way, they disarmed those who could have been the very ones to build resistance to the reactionary advances of recent years.

However, controlling social movements and building consent from this platform of weak reformism is not enough to explain the way the PT ruled. The Brazilian state had always represented a deeply autocratic form of domination and the PT governments did not contest this form; on the contrary, they were instrumental in its improvement. In the name of the preservation of law and order, especially during the so-called mega-events (but not only then), the armed forces have been called on to carry out interventions in the field of public security. This happened especially in peripheral neighbourhoods and slums, the places of residence of the most impoverished section of the working class in precarious living conditions. This kind of recurrent military intervention played a role in reinforcing the idea that the armed forces are a technical and moral reserve to solve the social problem of violence.

Thus, coercion and consensus gained a particular (but not exactly new) form of combination in the way the state was administered during PT governments.

**SF:** Despite being rooted in radical politics, even socialist politics, as a party, the PT governments were centre-left governments focused on the illusion of effective class conciliation. This means that Lula and his allies believed that it was possible to reconcile the profit-seeking focus of the Brazilian elites with long-overdue social gains for the working class. Whereas the governments did improve the lives of millions of Brazilians in terms of food security and access to university and consumer goods, as well as through job creation in strategic sectors, such gains were limited from the beginning. The PT governments had no intention of promoting even reformist politics, which is exemplified by the lack of agrarian reform and how education and health care were approached from a market perspective rather than through the promotion of a welfare state in Brazil. In the meantime, banks, agribusinesses and other corporations grew larger and watched their profits skyrocket. Inequality diminished, but not as much as it could have and not in a sustainable way: income transfers took place at the bottom of the pyramid, whereas the top was ever wealthier.



By looking at Lula's and Dilma's approach to education, for instance, one can see the explicit links between social investment and market gains that communicate the constant ambiguity of the Workers' Party governments. Access to university was expanded both through public and private approaches. On the one hand, there was an increase in public investment and the creation of new public universities, which, coupled with affirmative-action legislation, guaranteed an overall rise in enrolment together with a stronger presence of black, Indigenous and working-class students. At the same time, Lula strengthened FIES, a federal student-loan programme, to facilitate access at private universities. This was an important element to secure the education of approximately one quarter of all students enrolled in private universities, but it also meant the normalisation of access through financing that ultimately benefits private-university conglomerates, which charge very high tuition rates, whereas public university continues to be tuition-free. The same ambiguous approach that increases public access while private companies grow and profit can be seen in other programmes as well, such as the housing programme Minha Casa Minha Vida (My Home My Life).

I must also note that during the Lula governments, and the beginning of Dilma's first mandate, Brazil experienced economic growth that made these class-conciliation approaches look successful: the bourgeoisie was profiting at the same time that employment was stable and the working class could benefit from particular social programmes. This was, however, a false equilibrium, as would be exposed by the economic crisis. The way the PT responded to the crisis shows that not only had its government become accustomed to a centre-left position, the party itself was willing to give in even more to the market demands, so it kept investing in tactics of depoliticisation and demobilisation that were employed since Lula's 'Letter to the Brazilian People' in the 2002 elections. This *transformism* of the party, to put it in Gramscian terms, was important to secure consent in the leftist base to the centrist approach of the government.

**RN:** Rosa Luxemburg has a great line about revolution being like a locomotive going uphill: if it's not kept moving, it slides back, and reaction wins. The same can be said of reform. Lula's two terms could have been a good first act in a transition toward something else; but there was no plan for a second act, which meant that some of the positive changes produced by the PT started being undone already under Dilma. With the commodities boom, Lula chanced upon a formula for introducing progressive measures without much pushback. It was a perfect win-win deal: the rich got richer, the poor, less poor, and since what was being distributed was essentially new revenue, and there was a lot of it, it was possible to alleviate poverty and improve opportunities without structural reforms. Lula's government perfected the art of managing the tension between historical demands from its base and the status quo. With the left hand it enacted Indigenous land demarcation, agrarian reform, family agriculture; with the right, agribusiness and mining. Free software, open culture and a radical expansion of higher education with the left; every possible concession to corporate media with the right. Obviously, the right hand always had the bigger budget.

Now, transition is essentially about managing tensions; but if you are actually headed somewhere, over time you have to shift the balance of these tensions and start getting into structural issues. For that, you will need both to weaken the interests ranged against those transformations and to build an empowered social base that will actively support them. It seems clear that the PT never even intended to do either; in fact, they constantly put the brakes on their organised social base. Despite the fact that the party programme spoke of Bolsa Família as a first step towards a universal basic income, for instance, they weren't really transitioning towards anything else. It really is as though they believed that arrangement could last indefinitely. This is why I've described their Realpolitik as profoundly naïve: they treated 'reality' as a fixed, unchanging quantity.

Without that sense of direction and momentum, you'll eventually produce two effects that effectively ensure the situation can't last forever. On the one hand, you strengthen the forces that stand to lose from any deeper change – and sectors that grew steadily under the PT, like mining and agribusiness,

backed the impeachment wholeheartedly and are behind Bolsonaro now. On the other, you fail to politicise change and those who gain from it. Ethnographies of poor Bolsonaro voters (like those by Rosana Pinheiro-Machado, Lucia Scalco and Esther Solano) indicate this was exactly the case: many people who ascended socially with the PT came to reject policies that they had benefited from.

There were undeniable advances under the PT, especially in the reduction of inequality and increased access to higher education. However, what is revealing is, first, how fragile they were, and how easily they are being undone; and, second, how unwilling the Brazilian ruling class was to countenance even that little change. They would sooner sacrifice the country's institutional stability than let the PT continue to produce reforms. In the end, the ruling class expects a degree of privilege that is simply incompatible with a proper democracy. At the same time, there is a global tendency here: the growing divorce between capitalism and liberal democracy.

**LP:** In the mid-1990s, after two decades suffering the ills of high inflation, aggravated by the 1980s external debt crisis, Brazil was able to stabilise its economy. Yet, along with monetary stabilisation came a broad liberalisation programme, especially from the financial point of view. The FHC (Fernando Henrique Cardoso) governments from 1995 to 2002, in addition to implementing a heavy privatisation programme, tried to prepare the country to become an 'emerging financial power' and thus remedy, with capital operations, the chronic problems of the current account of the balance of payments of the country. Furthermore, they granted substantial benefits to financial wealth, raised the guarantees of state creditors (through the promulgation of the Fiscal Responsibility Law) and, with the adoption of some changes in the general compulsory pension system, which concerns private-sector workers and is organised by the PAYGO regime, they began to open the pension markets to the private financial sector, organised by the pension-funds regime.

Prior to this, the country had already internationalised its bond market in order to meet the claims of the foreign-debt negotiations, which happened to solve the 1987 moratorium. In addition, these governments adopted a rigid monetary policy, with the highest real interest-rates in the world, and kept the national currency constantly appreciated. This financial framework, which then began to control the accumulation process, was completed in early 1999 when, after the exchange-rate crisis, the floating exchange-rate regime and the macroeconomic tripod were adopted (primary surpluses, inflation-targeting regime and floating exchange rate).

When Lula assumed office, at the beginning of 2003, nothing of this was changed. The framework and the direction of economic policy remained the same. With FHC's governments, Brazil had become an international platform for financial valorisation and remained so (the greatest dollar gains in the world could be obtained in the country). The same parameters continued to preside over capitalist accumulation, and were even deepened: changes in monetary policy abruptly reduced the means of payment; a primary surplus target even more ambitious than that imposed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) was adopted; and interest rates, already extremely high (22 per cent a year) were even higher, reaching 26.5 per cent. In addition, new steps were taken to increase the financial openness of the economy, to raise creditor guarantees – this time from the private sector (through the reform of the bankruptcy law) – and to continue the opening of the pension markets to the private financial sector, now with reforms that have been approved for the pension systems of civil servants.

Two elements, however, arise to differentiate the PT government from its predecessors: privatisations were halted and social programmes of wide scope and high impact were adopted (Bolsa Família is the best-known of them). In parallel, there was also a strong willingness to raise substantially the real value of the minimum wage, which, through social-security benefits, reaches about 20 million low-income families in the country. The fact that our currency was extremely depreciated when Lula assumed office in 2003 (precisely because of the electoral terrorism

produced by the media in the previous year due to the expected victory of the PT candidate in the presidential elections) facilitated this task. It allowed the president to raise the real wage as the exchange-rate overshooting was reduced. At the end of his first term, in 2006, following a developmentalist inspiration, the Lula government launched an ambitious programme of public investments called the Growth Acceleration Programme, a substantial package of investments, about 13 per cent of GDP, expected to be implemented over 4 years, in infrastructure (transport, energy, water and sanitation). Throughout this period, the rapid pace of the world economy and the enormous increase in the prices of commodities exported by the country contributed to the relative tranquillity of the external accounts, including the possibility of accumulating a significant amount of foreign exchange. In Lula's second term, the launch of the My Home My Life programme, a huge and ambitious programme to build highly-subsidised popular housing, completed this non-liberal facet of the Lula governments. The blowing-up of the international crisis at the end of 2008 led to a halt in this process, because, thanks to a mere demonstration effect, the domestic-credit market froze. The situation was soon overcome with the use of public banks to resume the flow of loans. In addition, measures to subsidise the consumption of sectors with a high multiplier effect, such as the automobile and household-appliance industries, and a substantial expansion of credit to the lowest income strata provided an impressive recovery, causing GDP to grow 7.5 per cent in 2010. When Dilma assumed office in 2011, the consequences of the crisis were beginning to arrive more incisively. The conciliatory model, which had hitherto worked, combining improvement in the living conditions of the lower classes (which also involved greater possibilities of social ascension through changes in higher education promoted by the then minister of education Fernando Haddad), without disturbing the interests of those above and without decisively altering the financially structured framework of the accumulation process, began to fall apart.

**SP:** The rule of the Workers' Party (PT) from 2003 to 2016 was characterised by a pragmatic social-democratic reformism, sustained by the highly favourable position of Brazil in world export markets until 2012 and a broad political alliance in Congress with centrist and even conservative parties. There was a deliberate policy of conciliating the interests of the various sectors of capital and their political representatives with the aspirations of the PT's base in the working class and social movements.

From 2003 to 2012, more than 2 million jobs were created per year. Federal spending on social programmes was moderately increased, the minimum wage was significantly improved, consumer credit was expanded and a significant number of the very poorest Brazilians would be lifted out of abject poverty. There were also progressive measures adopted such as a law giving full labour rights to domestic workers and programmes to increase diversity such as quotas for blacks, Indigenous peoples and the poor in higher education and the public service.

Yet these advances came at a very high cost: as the historian of the PT, Lincoln Secco argues, the PT ceded hegemony to the 'ideologues of the financial markets'. Neoliberal financial policy - inflation targeting and central-bank autonomy, free movement of capital and floating exchange rates, and tight fiscal policies - was reinforced. Interest rates are among the highest in the world and over 40 per cent of government receipts are used to pay off the national debt. Financial capital benefited disproportionately more from the PT governments than any other group: in 2013, Brazil's four largest banks gained more in profits than the GDP of 83 countries.

The ostensible economic success of the PT governments (frequently exaggerated by government supporters) also cloaked important structural faults. The light- and heavy-industrial base grew very moderately while the PT governments aggressively promoted agribusiness and the mining sector, leaving the country subject to fluctuations in international markets. As Ruy Braga and other researchers have shown, almost all of the 2 million jobs created per year were poorly paid and precarious in sectors such as telemarketing and domestic service. By 2016, 44 per cent of the

economically active population was still informal, that is, without formal labour rights and benefits. The emphasis on agro-industry and mining, the creation of precarious low-wage jobs, and reliance on orthodox financial policies would make Brazil particularly vulnerable to the downturn in the world economy which reached Brazil in 2012.

In the political realm, PT governments successfully forged alliances with centrist and conservative parties not only to guarantee their electoral viability at executive levels but also to obtain majority support for legislation in the Congress. Key ministerial and bureaucratic positions were filled by either PT militants, many of them ex-union leaders, or members of allied political parties, creating a veritable bureaucratic machine organically linked to the party that was not immune to the existing widespread practices of various forms of corruption. Former political enemies – politicians closely associated to the brutal military dictatorship (1964–85) such as Delphim Netto, Jader Barbalho, Fernando Collor, and José Sarney – were courted by the government as political allies, power brokers, and consultants. While guaranteeing electoral viability, such alliances alienated the PT rank and file, handcuffed the government in advancing its overall programme and ended up fomenting the power of conservative politicians that would later betray the PT.

At the same time, the PT-allied Unified Workers' Central (CUT), and social movements such as the MST were tamed and in many cases their leaders were brought into the state machine. There was a low level of strikes and protests throughout the 2000s due to the precariousness of labour relations in the context of neoliberal productive relations and what Marcelo Badaró Mattos calls the 'progressive pacification' of many of the militant union leaderships in the country and their incorporation into the PT government. As a result, mass social struggles were largely absent until the economic crisis arrived with full force in Brazil in 2012.

There were no substantial challenges to the ideological dominance of neoliberalism and traditional economic structures or attempts to reform the distorted political system that allowed disproportionate power to corrupt clientelist politicians. The incorporation of conservative politicians into political alliances also severely hampered the PT's declared support for advances in social rights. Allied parties included a significant number of Evangelical Christians and former police officers who effectively vetoed many initiatives in LGBT, black, and children's rights.

The PT's public-security policy and its effective support for a phony 'war on drugs' witnessed Brazil's prison population rise to the third highest in the world and record-breaking numbers of homicides and violent crimes, many by Brazilian security forces that regularly kill poor and black people with impunity. An 'anti-terrorism' law was pushed through by President Rouseff in 2014 and police brutality against social movements was, at the best, wilfully ignored by PT governments at the federal, municipal and state level.

*3. The global capitalist crisis of 2008 has unfolded unevenly across different regions of the world. Its delayed reverberation into Brazil seems to begin most noticeably in 2012, with a sharp deceleration of the economy. What would you identify as the key political and economic consequences for Brazil and the attempted responses by different political and social actors? How did the Dilma Rousseff government react to the worsening international economic environment?*

**LA:** We are living in a time when the crisis has clearly become a springboard to attack rights, introduce austerity measures, and consequently increase financial gains and income concentration, not to mention how it was used to build the image of a new president who could put the country back on track.

In 2016, the government imposed a 20-year freeze on social spending and passed a labour reform that shatters the foundations of labour rights and alters the very nature of formal employment. We

are on the verge of pension reform. The over 40-million people that overcame extreme poverty to become the 'new middle class' are now faced with a major social regression, a trend observed as early as late-2013 that has intensified in recent years.

Theories from the left state that the political and economic measures Dilma introduced after being elected conflicted with her own manifesto. That line of action, closer to right-wing than to left-wing politics, is believed to have eroded support from both the left and also the population electing Dilma; at the same time, it did not gain support from the financial market and the business community in general as it would be expected. The reasons for this shift are not very clear to me. We should also keep in mind that Dilma had started a titanic fight with the financial market a few years earlier, when she lowered the benchmark interest-rate and the prices of financial services. What remains unclear as well is the shift of investors and the national elite - if this term can still be used to describe dominant groups - from walking side by side with the PT until then to joining the plot that brought down Dilma. To this day, I see no convincing explanation for that. Almost all the explanations are based on cultural approaches: due to being closer to our slavery heritage than bourgeois parameters, the elite is said to hate the upward mobility of the poor. I honestly consider this explanation quite inconsistent with the pact in place until then. The fact is that Dilma introduced a series of incentives for investment, but the investor community did not show up. Why was the pact broken?

Shortly before the election of Dilma, economist Leda Paulani pointed out what she called 'economic terrorism', that is, the financial market took the opportunity provided by the repercussions of the crisis to blackmail the government. With that in mind, it fuelled the crisis itself as a means to destabilise the political scene and bring about a policy change. The economic crisis not only fuelled anti-worker measures, but also intertwined with arrangements among actors with different interests who managed to foster an institutional crisis that culminated in the impeachment. Four years later, the fact is that the poor are back to square one; Lula is in jail; Bolsonaro has been elected; labour rights have been attacked and Brazilian construction companies, the backbone of the PT's administrations, have lost their clout to monopolise the Brazilian market and control public works. This means the crisis should be seen as another element of a larger plot that has led to the demise of a specific form of government and development conducted by the PT.

**RA:** The international crisis reached Brazil in 2013/14. Little by little, it weakened the alliance between the dominant class and the PT administration, as well as the alliance between the PT and its popular social base. If these groups had supported the PT administration during the years of economic growth, their support began to collapse when the economy showed signs of recession. The ruling classes were the first to dissent. The core dominant-class groups began to demand that Dilma return to enacting austerity policies based on prescriptions in the court of law, amplifying privatisations, increasing interest, preserving the primary surplus, alongside other measures to contain the 'terrorism' (in reality, measures to criminalise popular movements). Parallel to that, a new cycle of discontent broke out among the class of salaried employees that had sustained the PT administration. This found expression in strikes and rebellions.

The government's social-dialogue policies began to unravel. Two polar-opposite contingents from different social classes began to form. The first was born from the bourgeoisie, which was becoming increasingly opposed to Dilma. The other, consisting of salaried employees, increased their discontent since the new government policies only impacted the working class.

During this time, the bourgeoisie realised that Dilma would be incapable of implementing the policies of social destruction to the extent that they wished she would. Basically, they took it upon themselves to significantly decrease their salaries, partially repeal their labour rights, reform the pension system, and privatise whatever was left of the state-owned companies. The June 2013

protests cemented the already-deep social and political discontent.

Despite this political landscape, Dilma was re-elected in 2014 after an uphill battle. From there, Dilma strongly accentuated the fiscal-adjustment measures and scaled back gains made in workers' rights, such as unemployment insurance. She increased interest rates in the banking sector and designated a direct investment capital representative to implement a 'new' regressive programme. It was intended to placate the bourgeoisie whose political discontent was growing. Parallel to this, in an inverse reaction, the government increased the discontent of the working class, unions, and social movements that had up until then been supporting the PT administration.

The missing ingredient was found when the judicial investigation 'Operation Car Wash' (Lava Jato) was carried out. The Operation was conducted almost exclusively for the purposes of investigating crimes of corruption committed by the PT. With this new information, large swathes of the population began viewing the PT as the 'evil majority' and its government as an 'enemy' needing to be deposed. Making it impossible to offer a regressive and neoliberal programme that could have had social and popular legitimacy, the dominant class scrutinised the gifting ways of the PT. After months of political, parliamentary, judicial, and media clashes, Dilma was impeached in 2016, effectively ending the PT's long reign.

**MB:** Brazil suffered the impact of the crisis in the form of a brusque drop in the economic growth rate in 2009, but it then appeared to be making a swift recovery largely due to trade flows with China. Stimulation of Brazil's internal market also played an important role. The effect of those compensatory factors gradually began to wear off, and from 2014 the economic indicators began their trajectory of descent, showing that the economic crisis was to have its most profound effects in the period to come.

The crisis strongly broke the bases of social support of the federal government, then in the hands of Dilma. The worsening economic crisis in the presidential election year of 2014 made it very difficult for Dilma to get re-elected. There was a notable drop in votes cast for the PT in industrialised areas of the Southeast that had traditionally supported the party. After winning by a very thin margin an election in which she had employed a far more radical discourse of social commitment to grassroots interests, Dilma began her second mandate by abandoning those election-campaign appeals and endeavouring to respond to pressure from the dominant class by committing to an economic agenda embracing austerity. Although Dilma brought in a CEO from the largest private bank, Joaquim Levy, as her finance minister, and began her second term by cutting pensions and unemployment benefits, throughout 2015 various fractions of the bourgeoisie seem to have surmised that the PT was no longer capable of ensuring social peace, nor of carrying forward its latter-day agenda in the rhythm and depth that were required. So in the course of 2015 and the first months of 2016 bourgeois support grew for anti-corruption and anti-government demonstrations, called and organised by new right-wing organisations that emerged after the 'June Days' in 2013. But the profile of the protesters was very different. The anti-corruption and anti-Dilma demonstrations were basically comprised of the petite bourgeoisie and middle class. The repercussions of the economic crisis had been perceived first by the sectors with higher salaries or small businesses, which had been more taxed than in the previous years. This middle class also seems to consider the increase in the consumption power of the lower-wage sector of the working class, during the PT governments, as something they paid for. The protests played an important role in the process of Dilma's impeachment, confirmed in August 2016.

The class composition – higher salaried middle class and small and medium business owners – and regional distribution (mainly in the South and Southeast regions of Brazil) of the 2015/16 wave of protests were basically the same as those for the main electoral base of Bolsonaro in 2018.

**SF:** Following analyses by other economists in Brazil who are critical of neoliberalism, I tend to agree with Laura Carvalho's overall perspective of the crisis: Brazil was able to delay the impact of the global crises due to a combination between bold and developmentalist public investment in strategic sectors and a commodity boom. Then, the price of the commodities slowed down and plunged to the point of no longer protecting Brazil's growth pattern from other economic factors. With the recession, the government felt pressured to stop investing and to embrace austerity measures that would secure some growth in the industrial sectors. The problem, as became very evident in Dilma Rousseff's first mandate, but even more so from 2015 onwards, is that such an approach has a negative impact on the domestic market. The domestic market had grown in the past due to a general increase in purchasing power; at the same time, industry was not willing to translate these gains into overall investment in its own productive forces. Rather, they decided to pocket the benefits from tax cuts, layovers, and diminished workers' rights, which should come as no surprise, as it corresponds to what most capitalists do during economics crises, especially in a country whose bourgeoisie is still fundamentally oligarchic and dependent on exports rather than innovation.

I believe that the key problem here was very political, in the sense that the developments of the crisis and the way Dilma tried to handle it with an austerity approach shows how much the PT governments had come to trust the Brazilian bourgeoisie and see it as a partner, rather than as a force to keep in check and, especially, confront. By positing the government as the horizon of party politics, both the party and the government became enmeshed in a subservient position to capital. Rather than managing the economy through public investments that increase the economic participation of the working class, and securing, even expanding their rights, the government opted to trust the industry associations and corporations. At the same time, the party had already forsaken its role in organising the working class against this. Even worse, the party played a role in suppressing workers' mobilisations. The result is still an interpretation by Workers' Party intellectuals that most of the measures employed by Dilma were inevitable and that it was the right-wing articulation that prevented them from having a positive impact on the Brazilian economy.

**RN:** The effects were slow to arrive in Brazil, among other reasons, because of what the Lula government did right: the wealth distribution and public investment of those years made the internal market strong enough to withstand the international conjuncture. Yet it was all dependent on the commodity market, and nothing was done to decrease that dependence; again, no plan B, as if it could last forever. When commodity prices collapsed in 2014, the economy went into a tailspin. To make matters worse, this coincided with the explosion of the Petrobrás scandal, so that the two things have become indelibly associated in people's minds. The general opinion is that the crisis was caused by the PT and its coalition partners stealing all the money.

Yet it wasn't just about global exposure; the Dilma government made several mistakes, the gravest of which was an exceptionally wrong-headed policy of tax incentives for the biggest companies in the country aimed at turning them into international players (the so-called 'Brazilian champions'). That is absurd from the point of view of any transformative politics, as it means using public investment to concentrate rather than distribute wealth. But it was also senseless in those circumstances, as the internal market had been slowing down since 2011, and so instead of investing in production, the companies just took the money and speculated with it in financial markets.

The Dilma administration was the apogee of naïve Realpolitik: in the name of a very restrictive notion of 'this is how you get things done', it invariably decided in favour of capital, without realising they were at once chipping away at their base and strengthening potential enemies. 'This is how you get things done' also included high tolerance of corruption and an outdated, myopic developmentalism obsessed with building big national capital. This meant that the good work done under Lula in Indigenous rights, the environment, agrarian reform etc. started being undone, both in

rhetoric and actual policy. There was a formidable investment in new public housing, but the programme was designed with the interests of construction companies more than those of the users in mind, and ended up fostering urban speculation and putting up blocks of flats in distant areas with no infrastructure. The World Cup and Olympics were ridiculously wasteful. The Belo Monte dam symbolises that period to perfection: an aberration that made no economic sense, which has wreaked irreparable damage to the region, and we now know was steamrollered through because of a campaign-funding deal with construction companies. What's worse, people did it with a great sense of pride for having the courage to 'get things done'.

**LP:** The main consequences of the international crisis for Brazil were not of a financial nature, but of a real nature. The significant declines in volume and prices of commodities that began to appear in 2011 (the first year of the first Dilma term), with the onset of the slowdown in the Chinese economy, removed from the external demand the important positive role it had played over the two Lula terms, and especially the first. At the same time, in the same year, new turbulences appeared in international financial markets, with speculative attacks on the currencies of the most fragile European countries, raising uncertainty in all emerging countries.

Faced with the challenge to confront the coming crisis, President Dilma decided to respond to the calls for what was called 'the FIESP agenda' ('FIESP' stands for the Federation of Industries of the State of São Paulo, the most powerful business corporation in the country). In addition to the sharp deceleration in external demand, the consumption of the lower-income classes, which had boosted growth and private investment in Lula's second term, had already been compromised by the increase in household indebtedness, leading to the need for some initiatives to keep pace with growth. The FIESP agenda was only in a certain sense a non-liberal and anti-financialisation agenda, since it envisaged a rapid deceleration of basic interest rates (which were around 12 per cent in mid-2011), aiming to devalue the exchange rate and thus to curb a process of de-industrialisation.

It is true that President Dilma took this step farther, making strong speeches against the banking system and using public banks to force down the banking spread. The other part of the package, however, was more a kind of *supply-side economics* than a measure of a Keynesian or developmentalist inspiration. For the entrepreneurs, the most beloved part of the 'FIESP agenda' was the exemption of company payroll, with a substantial reduction in taxes. The government's expectation was that the offer of this respite would lead to an increase in private investment, reducing the impact of the international crisis on the growth of the Brazilian economy.

This, however, did not happen. In addition, public investments had also been slowed, to obtain the budgetary space for the exemptions. As a result, the total investment of the economy, which grew by an average of 9.1 per cent between 2006 and 2010, saw this growth fall to 2.2 per cent in the first Dilma term. Thus, the changes implemented by Dilma were not successful and growth did not return. In 2015, the first year of Dilma's second term, the president yielded to market terrorism and chose, to direct the economy, a leader of the financial market. Joaquim Levy adopted a model of austerity and deepened the crisis even further, opening to the elites a long-sought political space to ward off the PT from the command of the country. Beating the PT electorally remained a distant prospect (the PT had won four presidential elections in a row). However, the space for the right had broadened because of the deepening of the crisis provoked by the president herself.

**SP:** Economic growth, advances in social programmes and moderate income-redistribution from 2003 to 2012 were based completely on the high demand for Brazilian exports. During this period, there were also rising expectations generated – not just for economic growth and expanded credit, but for improvements in urban mobility and public services in general. When the global economic crisis hit Brazil and even modest economic growth and social spending could no longer be sustained, discontent, protests by social movements, and industrial action increased substantially.



From 2012 to 2014, there was an unprecedented wave of successful strikes in the country, including by the most precarious workers, as well as explosions of social movements such as the June Days of 2013 and the anti-World Cup movements in 2014. The consensus forged between the PT, the mass of the working class and young people in the social movements during the Lula governments began to unravel as did the attempt to conciliate the interests of the various sectors of capital with reformist social and economic policies.

In her first government from 2011-14, Rouseff attempted to maintain economic growth in the face of the coming crisis through what was called the 'New Economic Matrix', which basically included the reduction of interest rates, subsidies for industry, selective industrial protectionism and the concession of public services to private initiative. She even publicly criticised the preponderance of power of the financial sector. Increasingly, though, both industrial and financial capital and their powerful supporters in the corporate media began to complain about the concessions won by strikers and the necessity for both changes in the labour market and austerity in social spending.

After winning the 2014 election in a close race through last-minute promises to the PT's base that she would focus on job growth and not cut social programmes, she nominated the chief economist of the country's largest private bank, Joaquim Levy, as Finance Minister who massively cut social spending and began to reduce pensions and labour rights. These austerity policies not only worsened the recession, but, as Pedro Paulo Zahluth Bastos argues convincingly, did not satisfy either financial or industrial capital, which began to organise with the erstwhile allies of the PT, the traditional centrist and conservative political parties, as well as the corporate media and right-wing social movements to impeach President Rouseff.

The Car Wash scandal related to corruption in the state oil company, Petrobras - which fingered both leading PT politicians and allied politicians from centrist and right-wing parties - undermined the traditional political arrangements that had allowed for the conciliatory policies of the PT with the political establishment, creating a 'power vacuum'. The judiciary, always predominantly conservative, filled this 'power vacuum', but it was created by a combination of the economic and political crises that were produced by the exhaustion of the Brazilian economic development model and the end of the consensus between the working class and the dominant classes by the end of the first government of Dilma Rouseff in 2013.

*4. In June 2013, a wave of impressive urban rebellions emerged in Brazil in response to hikes in transit tariffs, the unreliability of privatised transit more generally, and the siphoning-off of public money to build football stadiums for the 2014 World Cup rather than attending to pressing demands of health care, education, and basic infrastructure. The immediate political dynamics of the June 2013 protests are complex, and even more so their political development over time. How do you interpret the legacies and consequences of these events?*

**LA:** The 2013 protests in Brazil catalysed a series of processes not visible at that time that still defy comprehension. The *gilets jaunes* movement in France, for example, seems to share some similarities with the 2013 protests to some extent. While there is a rebellion that seems to question the status quo from traditional forms of organisation to different aspects of capitalism itself, there is no clear left-leaning agenda, that is, challenging Macron does not necessarily mean not electing Le Pen. In both cases, we can see right from the start that the sphere of circulation has become a concrete space for class struggle. But, currently, class struggle is not easy to decipher.

Did 2013 expose the collapse of the PT's model of capitalist development? In other words, did the protests express in a rather unclear and not consensual manner that higher incomes, easier access to credit, lower unemployment and greater access to formal-sector jobs were no longer sufficient since inequality and its severe social repercussions had not been redressed? It should be noted that

the demands revolved mostly around the enormous gap between the earnings and mainly the rights of workers – who assert themselves no longer as workers, but as citizens – and the gains and rights of capital. What was at stake was the right to the city, the right to leisure, in a transport system in which around 6 hours of a worker's life are lost each day. We could see a kind of obscure opposition to financialisation and the concentration of wealth in its connection to deterioration of, and lack of investment in, people's well-being. But at the same time, it is becoming clear that the protests also expressed an explicit rejection of parties, trade unions and the political system. They cannot be immediately branded as fascist or far-right demonstrations, nor do they amount to a repudiation of the established order or embrace an anti-capitalist view to overthrow it. That remains a puzzle.

The protests gradually stirred up an angry middle class that longs to join the elite despite being closer and closer to the proletariat. That was definitely a key factor, but it is not enough to explain the Pandora's box opened in 2013. I am also unsure about whether we can blame the processes now culminating in Bolsonaro's election so widely on the 2013 protests or whether the demonstrations served as unexpected catalysts for ongoing processes that have finally come into sight and fuelled everything that has come in their wake.

The way I see it, the right managed to be much more flexible and reproduce practices originally adopted by the left itself with the opposite sign, gradually appropriating and shaping a narrative that was dispersed. In a supreme irony, we now have the Movimento Brasil Livre (Free Brazil Movement, MBL), a movement engaging a pseudo-liberal youth and arising in opposition to the Movimento Passe Livre (Free Fare Movement, MPL), a movement that has been active for years and is centred around public transport and new forms of political organisation. The MBL is now present in universities vying for the students' movement, has elected its candidates and has bargaining power at different levels of government.

The left is now faced with the daunting challenge of its fragmentation, coupled with fierce competition and a loss of legitimacy among social movements themselves. Note that despite this situation where the future president proudly announced that he wants to 'wipe the left off the map', we remain fragmented and are still dismissing one another, unable to decide which of us represents the 'old left', 'identity movements', 'fanatical PTists' or are the 'Foucauldian-Deleuzians'. In short, there seems to be no common narrative that can bring us together, strengthen us and protect us. Perhaps the legacy of 2013 is a strong opposition with no clear project to challenge capitalism as it is. However, the right has highly effective, flexible, adaptable, financial, political and symbolic means to conduct this narrative, in addition to being clear about its projects. The left is still struggling to lay down its horizons. Amid this situation, we have to stop turning a blind eye to much of the Brazilian population, realise that this movement did not engage the middle class alone and ask ourselves why those who benefited from the PT's model ceased to support it at a certain point.

**RA:** The June 2013 protest depicted a special moment in time that was a result of a conjuncture of rebellions in many parts of the world, bolstered by a series of factors growing during Brazil's recent history, such as the intensifying discontent with the use of public spending to finance the World Cup. These movements, with their distinct origins and causes, culminated in an explosive encounter that caused the outbreak of the June riots. The people revolted against the extravagant expenses imposed by FIFA during a time of declining public resources, particularly in the health and educational sectors.

We also have to keep in mind the strikes and rebellions at the construction sites in Jirau and Santo Antonio in Northern Brazil. They revolted against the brutal exploitation of construction and civil-engineering workers that were employed on projects linked to the Growth Acceleration Programme, further cementing the growing social discontent.

Under these circumstances, the June 2013 protests began. The popular sectors took to the plazas and streets, exercising more plebiscitary and horizontal practices which triggered a revolt against the current traditional forms of representation. Protesters challenged the myth of the 'new middle class' which was hailed as a great stride made by the PT administration.

The June 2013 rebellions were multifaceted, heterogeneous, and consisted of people of multiple classes. At the beginning, the movement was spearheaded by the student youth with the Free Fare Movement (MPL) that demanded free public transportation. While autonomous, they began to integrate the youth from different classes, even including apolitical youth who were inspired by anarchy, autonomism, and also militants of the leftist parties such as PSOL, Partido Socialista dos Trabalhadores Unificado (United Socialist Workers Party, PSTU), PCB, and others.

However, gradually the street protests began to change. They began to count on the inclusion of several social classes with right-leaning politics. These right-wing forces were pitted against the PT and the leftist 'reds' in the protests. There were calls for a return to military dictatorship, among other typical proposals of the conservative middle class. The slogans were taken up by the media and several dominant-class groups. Proto-fascist and fascist minority groups were born through social media and created to influence and actively participate in the protests, which laid the groundwork for open disputes between the rightist and leftist groups. Rejecting the traditional forms of representation in politics, such as Parliament, the Executive branch, and the Judicial branch somehow was the link that brought the protesters together.

The political consequences were remarkable and became more pronounced in the following years with the rapid politicisation and ideological radicalisation of the right wing, particularly the far right. What's surprising is that they managed to co-opt anti-institutional, anti-parliamentary, and anti-systemic symbols and give them an ultra-conservative meaning, and a storm began to brew in Brazil.

**MB:** The June 2013 protests are the main indicator that the PT government's loss of support had begun even before the symptoms of the capitalist crisis had started to become more serious in Brazil. On the one hand, the so-called 'June Days' were evidence of the emergence of grassroots demands for improvements in public services and, on the other, the first steps of occupation of spaces by an organised sector of the far right which presented itself publicly as proclaiming the extirpation of corruption.

It is a fact that the profile of the participants, at least according to a small number of studies by opinion pollsters, revealed a socially heterogeneous composition. However, they also revealed a clear predominance of demonstrators in the income levels between 0 and 5 minimum salaries and in the youth age group. Going a little beyond the appearances of the events, we should understand that even though there were diverse types of protests, including some with a clear reactionary purpose, the main demands of the demonstrations that developed throughout the process were progressive. They included the reduction in the price of public transport and the improvement of its quality, calls against police violence, against corporate media control, and in defence of public education and healthcare, all of which possess a clear class profile. These protests involved the interests of the wider working class that demanded, albeit in a diffuse form, more than just consumer access to the market, which the PT governments were presenting as their path to citizenship, but universal social rights.

If the 'June Days' represented a blow suffered by the support of some sectors of the working class for the PT government, it was also accompanied by the distancing of some fractions of the dominant class from the same government. This came about as the mass demonstrations showed that the government was no longer efficient in bringing about what it had promised (and which it had managed to do in the preceding years) which was social peace based on the logic of class

conciliation.

**SF:** June 2013 remains partly an enigma due to its shapeless development, its internal contradictions, and the way June responded to the Brazilian left and the Brazilian left responded to June. One thing that is worrisome, though, is how the moderate left in Brazil was quick to treat the whole of June as reactionary as soon as moralist demands arose and anti-PT sentiment made its way into the crowd. This was an easy attempt to do away with the responsibility to grasp the core of the events and to deal responsibly with those demands that authentically represent leftist principles: free/affordable public transit, improved public education and health care, and even the fight against corruption, which has long been appropriated by the right in Brazil but fits quite well in the left's anti-capitalist politics.

It is important to establish that June 2013 was also manifested differently throughout the country and the differences between protests usually corresponded to how vibrant and organised the left was in each of those cities. In Belo Horizonte, for example, where leftist articulation was important to guarantee opposition to mayor Lacerda and to fight for right-to-the-city demands, protests were more unified and anti-leftist sentiment was unable to take over the crowds. In places where the World Cup Popular Committees, focused on fighting rights violations associated with the mega-event, were also very active, they tried to fight over the meaning of the indignation against World Cup spending to ensure that it was not simply a moralist approach against the PT. Yet, the reality is that the fragmentation of the left, and the ambiguous position of the PT governments at the time, affected the ability of the left to interpellate the amorphous crowds. While part of the left rejected the crowds because they did not fit the proper description of a revolutionary subject or because they did not feel represented by the left the way leftist organisations thought they should, a few organisations of the radical left engaged enthusiastically in the opposite interpretations, hailing the crowds as absolutely progressive simply because they took to the streets unified by their distrust of the system. In this case, the left failed by reading the crowds in a formalistic way, by positing that everything that distrusts the system is naturally anti-systemic.

The right, on the other hand, managed to take the most advantage of June 2013. It is less of a matter of whether June was left-wing or right-wing, since it was inherently cacophonous, but more one of which political camp was able to connect to the basic demands and transform them into their own political agenda. The right managed to understand the general crisis of representation and channel distrust and indignation against the PT government. It also took public-service demands and turned them into a matter concerning corruption (centred on the PT) and privatisation, while stifling the more radical demands through moralist claims of non-violence in the streets. Therefore, undoubtedly, we must look at June 2013 to comprehend the rise of the conservative right in Brazil, not because June helped the right, but because the left, enmeshed in its own crisis, was unable to interpellate those crowds into an effective emancipatory political subject.

**RN:** If the 2013 protests could be summarised in a sentence, that sentence would be a question, and the question would be: 'So, what next? what's the second act?' This is the first thing to bear in mind: the demonstrations weren't against the government, they *interpellated* the government. The protests were led by the 'children of the Lula years', as a presidential aide called them at the time, and this generation had seen their horizons expand dramatically in the space of ten years, with greater access to education and information, improved living standards and purchasing power, better opportunities, more travel, new social mores, the global cycle begun in 2011 ... That created great expectations, but also sharpened the perception of structural bottlenecks still in existence: the cost and poor quality of public transport, health and education, police brutality, unaccountability and so on. At the same time, the first signs of economic decline had started to show, the wastefulness of the sports mega-events was laid bare and the PT's cavalier 'realism' was at an all-time high. So the question people were asking meant: 'Which side are you on? Are you committed to continuing the

process of change that you've started, or are you content with just being managers of the status quo?'

When you see it like this, there can be no doubt that the movement's original impetus was progressive. The PT, however, panicked: those were uncomfortable questions, and they were simply not used to seeing mobilisations they didn't control. Realising that the protests had garnered massive popular support and that the PT had antagonised rather than claimed them, the media spotted an opportunity: instead of opposing the demonstrations, they would resignify them as 'anti-corruption'. To the right, the dog whistle was clear: this was a chance to destabilise the government. That was when a young, tech-savvy new right first became visible. Yet this also attracted thousands who identified as neither right nor left and were having their first experience of politicisation. Now it was the activists' turn to panic and try to flush out the right by making the demonstrations more militant. It worked, but it also blocked the movement's expansion, as it drove away people with whom it might have been possible to build something. This is why the protests in Brazil failed to develop in the more populist direction that they took in Spain, for example.

The traditional right ('moderate' would be too generous) immediately sought out interlocution with this new right, brought them into the fold and made them into proper political players. On the left, the PT made little effort to establish dialogue, continuing to demonise protesters and condone their repression. The movement dispersed, many were left deeply traumatised, the organisational balance at the end was disastrous.

It was like a process of natural selection: the environmental conditions created by the PT and the traditional right selected which forces would come out of the protests, and their combined action ensured that only the new right could survive. The media frenzy around the judicial activism of Operation Car Wash also contributed to that. In 2015, it was this new right that organised the demonstrations that created the political context for the impeachment. They elected several of their candidates in the last elections, are now an important part of Bolsonaro's political base and will probably soon have their own party. As for the left, only in the last couple of years was some of the momentum of that period recovered, for instance by the feminist movement.

**LP:** The protests of June 2013 had two distinct phases. They were initiated by a left-wing, horizontalist, non-party youth, focusing on claims linked to public transport. At that time, in several cities of the country, the rates of urban transport (buses and subway) were being raised, triggering a wave of demonstrations. The organisation that stood out at this moment was the Free Fare Movement (MPL), which had existed since 2005 and was created at the World Social Forum, held that year in Porto Alegre (a city in the south of the country). Although not linked to political parties, the movement was clearly leftwing and since then had been struggling for zero tariffs across the country. In that first phase of June 2013, the protests, heavily repressed by the police, were either ignored by the mainstream media or reported as 'acts of vandalism' (because of a few violent interventions of the so-called 'black bloc' groups in the demonstrations). A more general popular dissatisfaction, an expression of the effects of the international crisis that were already felt, came in the wake of this initial movement, brought more people to the streets and eventually involved several other claims, much of them linked to indignation with corruption.

But the movement was already beginning to make an ideological inflection. As of June 17, a Monday after a week with demonstrations followed by strong police repression, mobilisations were further increased and, this time, the mass media, which had continued to speak in terms of vandalism, radically changed its framing of the events and not only began to support the movements (the word 'vandalism' disappeared from the coverage) but actively to summon them onto the streets. In this second phase, the police just looked on and the young people who started to stand out wore yellow-green rather than red T-shirts – that is, the colours of the national flag rather than the colours of the

PT. They claimed that the red of T-shirts and flags gave the movement a meaning coming from political parties, which was not good, because, according to these same young people, the movement was 'spontaneous' and yellow & green were the colours of all Brazilians. Some organisations started to stand out at this stage, all of them identified with right-wing positions and parties and which were anything but 'spontaneous': the 'Come to the Street' movement, linked to Partido da Social Democracia Brasileira (Brazilian Social-Democratic Party, PSDB), the party of FHC; the 'revolted on line' movement, which aggressively criticised the PT and preached the return of the military dictatorship; and the Movimento Brasil Livre (Free Brazil Movement, MBL), of obscure origin, but, as was later discovered, had been created by the Atlas Network, a set of right-wing foundations based in the USA. In my view, it is at this moment that the history of the country's political destabilisation begins. This process involved the re-election and impeachment of Dilma Rousseff, the imprisonment without evidence of former president Lula and his ban on running for the 2018 elections and the rise of extreme right, with the victory of Bolsonaro. The mass media suddenly realised that this was their golden opportunity to destabilise President Dilma and, fomenting this discourse of spontaneity, they literally set the country on fire (on June 20, demonstrators in Brasilia threw incendiary bombs in the Itamaraty Palace - headquarters of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, designed by the world-famous architect Oscar Niemeyer). Protests against the holding of major events (the World Cup and Olympics) and against the resources used to reform and build new sports infrastructure existed before and continued to exist after the peak of demonstrations in June 2013, not constituting, in my view, a decisive element of this chapter of Brazilian history, although the demands were, in general, reasonable.

**SP:** The June Days of 2013 constituted the most important social movement in Brazil since the end of the military dictatorship in 1985. Involving mostly young workers reared in the heady days of the high expectations of the PT governments, it brought millions of people on to the streets, was temporarily successful in revoking public-transit fare increases around the country, and highlighted key questions about the lack of urban mobility and the poor quality of public services. It is actually useful to place the June Days of 2013 within a wider cycle of protests and successful strikes that began in 2012 and continued until the middle of 2014, involving many precarious workers and social movements such as the People's Cup Committees.

Some on the left, especially PT leaders and associated intellectuals, have argued that the June Days led to the parliamentary coup against President Rouseff in 2016. This argument is erroneous on a number of counts: 1) until the victory against the fare hikes, the movement was characterised by a progressive, *class-based* set of demands, focusing first on the reduction of abusive public-transit fares and then expanding to the democratic right to assembly, for an end to police violence and oppression in poor neighbourhoods and against social movements, and for improvements in public services such as health care and education. There were also powerful critiques of the corporate monopoly of the media, controlled by a few super-rich families tied to the dominant structures of economic and political power; 2) while it is true that the corporate media tried to co-opt the movement and some right-wing forces did infiltrate the movement *after* the victory against the fare hikes, the coup in 2016 was a result of the complete capitulation of the Rouseff government to the neoliberal agenda in 2015, its inability to continue the politics of conciliation with the dominant classes and the resultant loss of support among its base; 3) Rouseff won the presidential elections a year and a half after the June Days and the forces that articulated the parliamentary coup only consolidated themselves afterwards even if they cynically aimed to cash in on the PT's loss of popularity as a result of the national protests in June 2013; 4) Critiques of the June Days from the 'left' belie a complete lack of support for legitimate popular movements uncontrolled by the 'responsible' union bureaucracy or a social-democratic party.

The tragedy of the June Days was that the radical left was not able to build an alternative to either

the decadent policies of the PT or the wave of conservatism that led to the coup in 2016 and eventually to the election of Bolsonaro in 2018. Yet they are still a powerful historical symbol for the possibility of mass struggle from below.

*5. One notable political consequence of the global crisis of 2008 has been the frequent collapse of centrist parties and the rise of new far-right articulations, sometimes accompanied on the other side by a partial renewal of popular class struggle and left-wing political movements – that is, novel forms of political and social polarisation. In the Brazilian case, rather than socio-political polarisation, we seem to have witnessed the collapse of the centre-left and centre-right and the rise of a far-right, with little corresponding renewal of the far-left. What explains in your view the relative weakness of the far-left and popular movements in the face of the decline of the PT?*

**LA:** Once again, the leftist movements are unable to join forces around a common project. Have we by any chance become a neoliberal left playing a highly competitive game, plagued by silencing and dismissals, to decide which narrative will win? But we also have to look at this collapse from a broader perspective and ask ourselves what it means to be far-left these days. What are the projects? What social grip do they have in a world still governed by the prevailing notion that ‘there is no alternative’ despite the collapses and disasters observed day by day? Maybe the rebellions breaking out worldwide for years – regardless of each one’s peculiarities – are telling us we do not know which alternative we want, but it is not the one out there. The far-left seems to lack the means to shape, and trace a route for, this rejection.

Today we see a demoralisation of the left pervaded by the corruption charges against the PT, but there is a deeper global phenomenon: the dismissal of anti-capitalist organisations and their horizons. Interestingly, we can no longer talk openly about the conflict between capital and labour without running the risk of being immediately thrown into that attic the bearded old men from the ‘old left’ have been relegated to; however, the demands that seem to guide today’s public debate are, one way or another, related to this conflict. But the labour side is now fragmented, ill, hemmed-in and guided by the idea and reality of ‘may the best man save himself’. In addition to the glaring lack of a daring formulation for this dilemma, part of the left focuses clearly and permanently on its own governance.

The PT’s decline also marked the end of a significantly long period in which social movements and the far-left itself worked under the umbrella of compromise. In other words, it was difficult to play the role of opposition with the Workers’ Party itself in power. Since the impeachment, the left has been both attacked and apparently demoralised, in addition to being fragmented, while much of it still seems to be mainly guided by electoral goals. What is harder to understand is the lack of active engagement against the Temer administration. Many militants have been assassinated – is it becoming something banal? – reforms and measures that would have been fiercely opposed in the 1990s have been approved in recent years.

**RA:** The political consequences that the left suffered were dire. We can sum them up in the following way: in the aftermath of the June rebellions, the centre-left administration of Dilma Rousseff reaffirmed its policy of primary surplus and sought to assuage the different groups of people that were becoming increasingly resentful of the government. Therefore, the government revealed itself to be completely incapable of understanding the profound depth of the resentments that caused the riots. After an initial period of paralysis, the PT showed itself to be unprepared for self-criticism. Complacently, it kept treating the riots as actions against the government led by the right.

The leftist parties outside of the PT (PSOL, PCB, and PTSU), from their different vantage points, attempted to theorise and understand the movements and provide a distinct leadership. The disruptive potential, the originality, and the profound meaning of the social protests were

recognised. They noticed that they had a plebiscitary, horizontal, and autonomous character compared to the existing parties (including those of the left). But this understanding wasn't taken as far as it could have been. With the ebbing of the protests, the party left prioritised their actions once more and focused on the 2018 elections. They did not manage to relate their programmes (anti-institutional, anti-parliamentary, and anti-systemic) into concrete action within the protests.

Right-wing parties, the majority of which were centrists, distanced themselves from what effectively occurred during June 2013 and began to prepare for a new electoral battle with the same institutionalising formulas as before. They believed that with the decaying PT, the electoral landscape could be more favourable, especially after the parliamentary coup in 2016. They were unable to understand the 'electoral pendulum' (PT vs. PSDB) would not repeat itself this time. And that vision led them to failure.

However, in the far-right movement, something unique began to form. Observing that the international political conditions were favourable, especially after Trump's victory in the United States, they recognised that there was fertile ground to create an 'alternative' candidacy that was 'contrary to everything and everyone' and outside of the 'system'. The far-right began to promote itself aggressively on social media as being 'against corruption', 'against ideologies', and 'against politics', which significantly increased their multi-class social base. Their main enemy was the PT (and all leftists), as if all leftists were corrupt and colluding with the PT government. Little by little, a far-right movement was growing that would completely change the course of Brazilian politics.

**MB:** The right-wing wave of votes, which elected Bolsonaro, was also responsible for catapulting a new generation of MPs and politicians in many functions with the same reactionary profile. Bolsonaro joined a small party to run for president - the Partido Liberal Social (Social Liberal Party, PSL) - and the party climbed from one to 52 MPs, also electing four senators and three governors. PSL and other small parties supporting Bolsonaro inherited most of their votes from the traditional centre-right parties, especially PSDB and Movimento Democrático Brasileiro (Brazilian Democratic Movement, MDB, the main supporters of Temer's government). Despite the undeniable reactionary bias of these results, the PT loss of MPs was not that radical. It was still the largest party in seats (with 56 MPs, 13 less than in 2015) and the party preserved four governors in the Northeast.

The only party to the left of the PT with any parliamentary representation, PSOL, actually increased its numbers in the House of Representatives (from 5 to 10) and managed to survive the new barrier clause ruling political parties. Nevertheless, PSOL had its lowest presidential vote since 2006. Its candidate was Guilherme Boulos, a leader from the main housing movement in Brazil, the MTST. The alliance between PSOL and social movements to sustain Boulos's candidacy had an excellent reception among union and social movement activists, as well as among the left-oriented academic community, but the fear of Bolsonaro's election in the first round was determinant among a layer of these sectors in deciding to vote for the PT candidate, Fernando Haddad. Nevertheless, the weight of the PT among the poorest sectors of the working class and its resilience in the Northeast was not challenged by the farleft in this election. It is also important to remember that Lula da Silva was the first name in the polls even after his imprisonment, and his condemnation was necessary to guarantee he would not win the election.

Nevertheless, social struggles and social movements are not frozen. Since 2013, we have seen more than 2,000 strikes each year and the attempts to resist the austerity measures and reforms in the pension system and labour rights led to a general strike in April 2017. The potential of unified union struggle was undermined by the expectation of reversing the attacks with the return of Lula da Silva to the Planalto Palace in the 2018 election. CUT, the main trade-union confederation (linked to the PT), and other allies, have refrained from efforts to organise a second general strike and increase the intensity of working-class mobilisations.



More recently, during the campaign for the first round of the elections, a spontaneous articulation in social media gave rise to the movement Women United against Bolsonaro (Mulheres Unidas contra Bolsonaro) which was swiftly supported by the feminist movements and by their representatives in left-wing organisations. In practice, that movement constituted an anti-fascist united front with a nation-wide outreach and got millions of people out onto the streets on September 29 and hundreds of thousands on October 20, a week before the second round of voting. In the last week of the electoral campaign, large crowds attended Haddad's rallies. However, the movement of those thousands who went campaigning from door to door and others who set up stools in the squares offering to talk to voters who were still undecided was what was most remarkable. Such a grassroots mobilisation had not been seen in Brazil since the 1989 elections (the first direct elections after the end of the military dictatorship).

Students have also taken part in movements of resistance in the public universities, and in the first days after the elections, assemblies and events in the main capital cities indicate that there are many people already seeking to construct organised resistance to the measures announced by Bolsonaro and the greater threat of an intensification of the autocratic features of the Brazilian State.

**SF:** I would like to point to three elements here. First, whereas the decline of the PT is obvious, especially in electoral terms, it remains a hegemonic force within the left. The PT has coordinated the general narratives about what is possible and what is not in Brazil since the 1990s and this approach secured a level of demobilisation under its governments such that class conciliation could be advocated without many complaints. This practice continuously stifled other leftist alternatives. Even though it is attacked by the right and anti-PT sentiment is widespread, the way the PT still has a hold over most social movements in Brazil and is still the strongest electoral force relative to the radical left shows how much its decline cannot be read as the complete ruin of the party. There is still a lot at play here, especially considering whether it will be able to form leadership as strong as Lula's and what will be its relationship to social movements now that it is officially outside of the government.

Second, Brazilian electoral politics relies, very much, on strong public leaders that are projected evenly throughout the country. Although June 2013 and distrust of the PT within the left have favoured autonomous mobilisations, one must conclude that the non-PT left has found it challenging to project leadership that can compete with the names the PT is able to bring forward through its own structures. It is useful to look at the dilemmas around Ciro Gomes of the Partido Democrático Trabalhista (Democratic Labour Party, PDT), Fernando Haddad (PT), and Guilherme Boulos (PSOL). Gomes was a strong runner-up in the elections up to the last couples of weeks, and even though he represented a very centrist programme, his speeches and style of leadership sometimes made him sound to the left of the PT, which attracted even votes from the PSOL. Haddad, on the other hand, was well-known, but not as much as Lula or even Gomes at that point. The difference was made by Lula's endorsement, the strong apparatus of the PT, and the way the party means a lot more in terms of electoral power in Brazil than Gomes's PDT. Boulos, who had been approached by PSOL precisely for being a national leader, underperformed for a variety of reasons - from his own association with Lula, which made it hard for voters on the left to see a big difference, to PSOL's general weakness to portraying itself as anti-systemic.

This leads us to the third point: the decline of the PT in Brazil is not simply the decline of the PT, but of the left in general. The majority of the anti-PT sentiment that has affected the PT has also impacted the remainder of the left as anti-leftism and anti-communism. The radical left has found itself unable to handle the anti-leftism, while it has not developed a proper base of its own to be able to grow. I have referred to this in my other work as a 'crisis of praxis' and some of it has to do with how fragmented the left is in Brazil, while there are other elements such as the radical left's expectation that the decline of the PT would directly result in its own growth, when a thoughtful

strategic approach was necessary to reconnect with the working class.

**RN:** If there's anything to which Gramsci's saying about the new not being born because the old is not done with dying applies in Brazil today, it's the left. The PT is a waning hegemon, but a hegemon nonetheless; its organised social base and electoral clout, while dwindling, remain substantial. Haddad's electoral performance perfectly illustrates the impasse: being Lula's candidate is enough to get you to the run-offs, but carries so much rejection that you're almost guaranteed to lose. But another force keeping the PT in place is the hatred against it: the sheer rabidity of *antipetismo* helps keep *petismo* alive. Dilma's second term would probably have discredited the party definitively; her impeachment and Lula's imprisonment regorganised the PT's base and made many people more willing to disregard its myriad faults.

The impasse is the following. In Brazil's staggering social inequality, we can clearly see the principal contradiction between rich and poor, those who have all manner of privileges and those who have no rights, those who are overrepresented and those who have no political representation, etc. For some time after redemocratisation, this contradiction was approximately represented within the political system by the opposition between the PT, which spoke for interests that no-one else spoke for, and all the other parties, which came together to lock the PT out. Because electoral politics tends to dominate the political game, this became the principal aspect through which the contradiction manifested itself. The more the PT became integrated into the establishment and similar to all other parties, the more it became a distorted representation of it, but that remained the dominant aspect because nothing took its place.

What 2013 did was cut diagonally through that polarisation and introduce a new aspect to the contradiction: the opposition between society and an unaccountable, self-serving political system as a whole, akin to the 'citizenism' found in the Arab Spring, Spain's 15M etc. This destabilised the growing centrist détente between the PT and all other parties, causing a seismic shift.

Evidently, 'society' is crisscrossed by contradictions, so that unity was always bound to be fragile. Yet there was a moment in which it could have moved in a progressive direction, and both the PT and the traditional right worked against that. The latter, because they obviously have no interest in an overhaul of the political system; and the PT, because the displacement of the PT/anti-PT polarisation threatened their very *raison d'être*. Both sides therefore conspired to reinscribe that new opposition within the coordinates of the political system, subsuming it under *petismo* versus *antipetismo*. This worked, but at the cost of increasing the identification of both the PT and the traditional right with that reviled system. This collusion is what enabled the far right to present themselves as both *antipetistas* and anti-systemic. Yet it also tied the hands of the left, as now it was forced to square the circle of being critical of the PT and critical of *antipetismo*, anti-systemic but against the attacks on the system coming from the right, and so forth.

This is a position all but impossible within the given coordinates, especially when you have nowhere near the same resources that other actors can mobilise, and when the war on the PT is a step in a war on the left as a whole. Yet it's clear that the left can only cut this Gordian knot by escaping the *petismo/antipetismo* polarity; for as long as we stay within it, we'll be exactly where our adversaries want us to be. Tellingly, the most successful mobilisations since 2016 (high-school occupations, feminist demonstrations, the lorry drivers' strike) were diagonal to that opposition. In contrast, when the PT tried to put their stamp on the movement against Temer's reforms, they killed it.

**LP:** From my point of view it seems still too early to speak of 'the decline of the PT'. Despite being defeated in the presidential election (after four straight victories), the party made up the largest bench in the Chamber of Deputies and it elected four state governors. The problem with the PT is that, although it was born in the midst of military dictatorship, from the massive strike-movements of

the blue-collar workers of the 1970s (from which Lula emerged), it became 'a party like any other'. In other words, despite being born from a strong social base, it went on to play the political game as it was always played, with no concern for the politicisation of the few processes of change that Lula's governments eventually led. I think that not only here, but also around the world, there is a crisis in the traditional way of doing politics, namely, of so-called 'representative democracy', in a process that the Brazilian sociologist Francisco de Oliveira calls 'the irrelevance of policy'. This result is not alien, quite the contrary, to the domain of neoliberal discourse and policies for almost four decades and explains the sinking of centrist parties, be they centre-left or centre-right. Considering that different parties, a little more to the right, a little to the left, enter and leave government and nothing seems to change, the more-radical options begin to become attractive.

Nevertheless, it is the right-wing radicalism that has been winning around the world, not the left-wing radicalism. I think this deserves an explanation, and this explanation goes through ways that transcend purely economic and/or political variables and analyses. Here we must mobilise philosophers, urban anthropologists, sociologists. Reading Pierre Dardot and Christian Laval, Nancy Fraser, Dany-Robert Dufour, Wolfgang Streeck, Naomi Klein, André Gorz, among others, it is possible to see that in the historical period beginning in the late 1970s, it was not only the maxims and neoliberal policies that gained prominence: the ideological victory was also resounding. The insistent neoliberal preaching, almost always accompanied by the motto *there is no alternative*, was transforming hearts and minds and instituting, in the minds of many people, including those most negatively affected by the rise of neoliberal policies, the values of competition, of every man for himself, of the self-made man, of self-worth, of self-love, of the self-made entrepreneur. Cooperation, solidarity, the importance of the collective, of the commons, of the community, were thrown into the depths of history, together with the Berlin Wall and the 'old' and dusty expedients of the nation-state, of class society, of universal policies, of social/state controls imposed on the fury of accumulation. As Nancy Fraser reminds us, even the so-called identity agenda (women, LGBTQIs, racial minorities) was entirely captured by 'the winner takes all' spirit. It is not surprising that, particularly after the 2008-9 crisis, the reaction to the ills of the neoliberal world turns 'against' the system in the wrong direction and ends up strengthening it, dragging democracy itself into the depths of history. Brazil, in my view, does not escape this rule, although here some domestic elements should be further mobilised to explain the victory of the extreme right.

**SP:** First, the centre-left and centre-right may be down but they are not yet out. The PT still has the largest number of federal deputies of any party and governs four states. And the centre-right still retains a considerable number of elected officials at all levels and is already being incorporated into the Bolsonaro government. Both forces will play important roles in the years to come.

The main reason for the relative weakness of the far-left has been its inability to overcome the PT model of moderate social-democratic politics which has dominated the left as a whole for 30 years. Indeed, important sectors of the radical left (in PSOL, for example) aim to reproduce the 'golden years' of the PT when the party was honest and true to its social-democratic principles. This has made it extremely difficult to dissociate itself from the PT. In the wake of impeachment in 2016 and the rise of Bolsonaro, it is also important to highlight that the wave of conservatism, aided by the corporate media, has also impacted on the far-left which has been closely, if frequently unfairly, associated with the PT. The PT with its massive membership, party machine and control of many unions and social movements has also made it difficult for the far-left to get a secure foothold in the broader left.

In my opinion, the highly fragmented far-left, including PSOL, lacks a consolidated theoretical and political tradition that can guide its interventions in economic, political and social debates as well as around organisational questions and the sometimes-conflictual relationship between parliamentary activity and social and movement activism. It is necessary to construct a coordinated politics around

the key issues of the day that relates directly to the fears and aspirations of the majority of the population, relating to the unions and the social movements in a principled but non-sectarian manner. There have been some local successes in this respect, but it has not been generalised for the far-left on a national basis. While PSOL, for example, more than doubled its number of federal deputies and won similar victories in several states in the 2018 elections, it has yet to consolidate its interventions in social movements and among the working class as a whole.

*6. The planning and execution of the parliamentary coup which ousted the Dilma Rousseff administration in 2016, and the imprisonment of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, 'Lula', in April 2018, both involved charges of 'corruption'. Anti-corruption has long been a lynchpin in the Brazilian right's arsenal against the Brazilian left, and in both of these latest scenarios the media and judiciary played central roles in channelling the anti-corruption charges specifically at the PT. How should we understand 'corruption' and the role of the judiciary theoretically and politically in the Brazilian context? Is there something specific about the Brazilian state form which helps explain this recurring political phenomenon? What is the appropriate left response to charges of corruption originating on the right?*

**LA:** I will be focusing on a specific aspect of this issue. The discourse of corruption obfuscates the predatory actions of financial capitalism very efficiently. Note that the middle class, which accuses the PT of having plunged the country into an unprecedented crisis, has surreally erased from memory how '*good for everyone*' the country was for 14 years. People are making a fuss about how corruption destroyed the country, destroyed Petrobras – it is a smokescreen for what has actually happened this decade. In addition, the middle class fell in love with Partido Novo (New Party), which put forward a banker worth over 400 million reais as a presidential candidate. It is hard to understand how this fetishism works. What kind of meritocracy and entrepreneurship discourse is powerful enough to cover up the capital-labour conflict to such an extent? Or has this gone beyond fetishism? Could it show a blatant acceptance of inequality, of the destruction and exploitation of the poor, and of billionaires' gains? We are grappling with those issues today. But the fact is that corruption set the tone for both the hatred against the PT and the love for Bolsonaro.

On the other hand, part of the left still refuses to address or discuss the boundaries of governability and of adherence to the structural forms of government prevailing in Brazil. Instead of addressing those issues and, going a step further, shifting the focus from corruption to legal means of expropriation of public money and to the structural foundations of the state, it provided no satisfactory response to the PT's moral destruction under way.

**RA:** Corruption is an endemic trait of Brazilian capitalism. It's been a recurring practice throughout republican history. It's more of a rule than an exception. It always exists when the central and right parties are in power. It's a fundamental part of a *modus operandi* of the bourgeoisie that was born under the sign of primitive capital accumulation, and that seems to be incapable of surviving without misappropriating the *res publica*. But what's decisive is that it's repeatedly used by the dominant class and its right-leaning parties looking to 'hide' the central characteristics of Brazilian capitalism. One of its fundamental elements is the super-exploitation of labour. And when corruption was found to be practised by the PT (which was born under the principle of ethics in politics), the right found the missing piece that allowed it to deliver a final blow to the administration.

Defeated in the 2014 elections, the right found a political opportunity through the coup that it couldn't achieve through votes. After another year of conflict and with the support of the media and Parliament, Dilma was impeached in 2016, definitively ending the PT's long reign. The explicit support of the judicial system, especially with Operation Car Wash, centred their actions on investigating the party, and it was a decisive way to legitimise the parliamentary coup. The PSDB, during the FHC governments, had countless complaints of corruption against it, particularly during

the privatisations and when a re-election proposal was approved by Congress with the accusation of many members of parliament being 'bought'. But, symptomatically, neither FHC nor the PSDB were investigated in the same way that Lula and the PT were.

For that reason, the impeachment is harshly criticised by independent judicial bodies. It's problematic, especially for those whose political leanings are further left than the PT, to emphasise that there can't be any tolerance of the damaging practices to the public exchequer committed by high-ranking members of the PT and its administration. The critique must be extensive and encompass all the parties in their entirety which are implicated in acts of corruption.

Therefore, the coup that removed Dilma was the first important event in the process that culminated in Bolsonaro's electoral victory. It began a new phase of bourgeois domination in Brazil that can be characterised as a sort of 'preventative counterrevolution' (Florestan Fernandes) that occurs when there is no actual risk of revolution.

Given the impossibility of winning electorally, the ruling class once again searched for autocratic forms of domination. And it was done through a coup. This conservative movement behind the coup unified around the project of eliminating reforms made by the union and labour movements throughout the twentieth century. After decades of relative democratic liberty, it was time to reclaim autocratic domination under the veil of legality. All of this was done to make *devastating* policies viable.

**MB:** In the Brazilian context, the main agenda of the far-right political groups from the Global North – against migrants, Islamophobia, Euroscepticism in the EU, for example – are absent or have a low weight. Therefore, the conservative moral agenda, the fear of criminal violence and the idea that state corruption is the origin of all evil are at the core of right-wing propaganda in the country.

If corruption is inherent to capitalism, the social perception of its iniquities changes according to the historical moment. Left-parties always associated corruption with traditional politicians and their intimate relations with private corporations. When left-parties, whose discourses were always of denunciation, are caught in corruption scandals, the impact tends to be greater, associated with a social feeling of betrayal. Despite that, in 2006 Lula da Silva was elected for his second term in the middle of a corruption scandal that resulted in the imprisonment of ministers and leaders of the PT. The electoral impact of denunciations against Lula and the PT was not that strong in a period of economic growth, a good time for business and of economic improvement for low-wage workers. After 2013, the effects of the crisis gave another connotation to denunciations against the PT's involvement in corruption.

The socialist organisations of the left must deal with the challenge of showing how the PT's corruption was the necessary result of its option to rule the state in the traditional ways of the bourgeois parties, instead of mobilising people to dismantle these rotten political structures. However, at the same time, we should denounce the selective pattern of procedure from the judiciary system, which narrowed the focus of the inquiries to strike politically only against the PT and its allies. That is because anti-PT sentiment has been a reactionary instrument the effects of which can be measured by the election of Bolsonaro.

**SF:** The left has failed to deal with corruption and to position itself as the authentic political force that opposes corruption in Brazil. This relates, partly, to the fact that the left often denounces right-wing corruption but does not examine itself as much as it should when it comes to such practices. In Brazil, electoral fraud is a common complaint at union and party congresses – it has become almost normalised. At the same time, the PT did not approach the Mensalão corruption scandal of 2005 in a way that could have repositioned the party. At the time, even though it had become quite obvious

how members were indeed involved in the scheme, the party opted to claim conspiracy by the right and the media, rather than to show, publicly, that it was doing everything possible to remedy the problem and ensure that all party activities could be as transparent as possible. This was a missed opportunity for the PT and a new window of opportunity for the right, which would endlessly associate the PT and the left with corruption from then on.

At some point, leftist parties need to face corruption problems head on, without making excuses or simply pointing their finger at the right. This is necessary to regain credibility, especially for when the left does need to defend people who are being wrongfully accused of corruption. It also has to deal with the Brazilian judiciary for what it is: a partial institution that is still made up, mostly, of bourgeois and petty-bourgeois officers who are inclined to interpret the law in favour of their own interests. Finally, the left has to re-examine its communication strategy and invest in alternative communication if it plans on dealing with how fast false accusations spread, come to grips with how much the right has controlled major political narratives in Brazil in the past decades, and think about what it must do to politicise corruption as more than a moral issue.

**RN:** Corruption is another area in which the non-PT left finds itself in a double bind. Ideally, one should be able to criticise both corruption (PT's included) and judicial excesses; but in a highly polarised debate this is very difficult, because whenever you do one of those, one side will accuse you of not doing the other. Public debate in Brazil in the last few years has played out as if statements like 'the PT is involved in corruption' and 'Dilma's impeachment is a sham', or 'Lula knew what was happening' and 'Lula was jailed on shaky grounds', weren't perfectly compatible, and one had to choose between them. That is further proof of the dominance of the *petismo/antipetismo* polarisation. What's worse, the association between PT and corruption spills metonymically into the rest of the left, meaning that everyone is tarnished with the same brush. The YouTube ideologues that are a key part of the Bolsonarista media ecosystem have managed to make 'communism' essentially synonymous with corruption.

When the first big corruption scandal involving PT irrupted in 2005, some people within the party called for a serious reckoning with it, but since Lula survived that turbulence and won the re-election, the majority position of sweeping everything under the rug carried the day. Consequently, when a much larger scheme was uncovered by Operation Car Wash, the party's only available response was to double down and say it was all a conspiracy to destabilise the government, even as that stretched plausibility more and more.

Eventually, it became impossible to talk about corruption without it rebounding back on the left. This led several people in and around the PT to rationalise that impossibility by saying that, since anti-corruption has historically been used by the right against progressive governments, corruption is not a real question but only a right-wing issue. The problem with that is twofold. Firstly, while the historical analysis is accurate, the argument rests on a fallacy that deduces from the fact that a concept is poorly defined that the thing it refers to doesn't exist. Secondly, when in the midst of a gigantic scandal you choose 'corruption is only a right-wing issue' as your message, what you're doing is confirming the impression that the left is unrepentantly corrupt and hand all agitation around the issue to the right. Do that at a moment when corruption is a top news story and major concern, and it's politically lethal.

To me it's evident that the answer must be: yes, anti-corruption has historically been a weapon of the right; and yes, corruption is real and cannot but be a question for the left. It is so because it is part of the problem of differential access to the state that is intrinsic to how capitalism works: the fact that for most the state means bad services, unaccountability and police violence while for a few it's privileged access, inside information, influence over policy, multiple-digit contracts and so on.

We need to redefine the concept and disarm its ideological functions, for sure; for example, the way it works as a magic cause that explains all the country's ills. But to pretend it doesn't exist or is not a question for the left is not just political suicide: it's simply wrong.

**LP:** Brazilian history is marked by these episodes of accusation of corruption, which come from right-wing politicians and parties toward leftist politicians and parties. Getúlio Vargas killed himself because of this in 1954. 'To end the strikes, the bustle, the corruption and the robbery' was one of the main alibis of the military to justify the coup and the end of João Goulart's government ten years later. The impeachment of Dilma Rousseff was done under the pretext of huge accusations of corruption against the PT and its main figures. In moments like this, the left, in general, finds itself in an uncomfortable position because, while on the one hand, ethically speaking, it must support measures and operations against corruption, on the other, it knows that, in most cases, this disposition to 'cleanse' politics of the 'bad elements', has, in fact, almost always the intention to sweep the left away. In 2005, with the invaluable collaboration of the mainstream media, a relentless campaign of defamation and demonisation of the PT and its highest-profile leaders began. Responding to the ever-present, anti-corruption demand from society, the country's judiciary, with the approval of the economic elites and right-wing parties, undertook a selective 'cleansing operation', which went on to 'judge' and punish the politicians of the PT and politicians (some of them of the right-wing parties) who were aligned with the PT in government and also in its parliamentary basis.

Meanwhile, most politicians and right-wing parties, particularly the PSDB (the party of FHC), even with massive evidence of corruption practices, continued to be handled with the usual camaraderie. It is in this sense that we must understand many of the judicial processes in our recent history: the criminal action 470 (in the process known as 'mensalão'), the unfounded impeachment of Dilma, Operation Car Wash, the legally unsustainable imprisonment of Lula at the peak of that operation, and the ban on him competing in the elections - being the favoured candidate by far and enjoying almost twice the voter intentions of Bolsonaro in the polls. In Bolsonaro's personal approach to voters in the last weeks of the second round, trying to sway voters in his direction, one of the most-heard arguments that was that the PT was in fact the most corrupt party, because most of the convicted politicians were or had been linked to the party. In fact, the PT, by whatever criterion chosen (politicians who have been removed, prosecuted, etc.) is always in ninth or tenth place in the corruption rankings. The parties appearing in the top positions are all those which are with Temer. Nonetheless, voters remained suspicious, and continued to believe in the PT's corrupt image, which they have been indoctrinated to believe for more than a decade.

The interests of large international capital, especially the oil sector, also played a decisive role in Bolsonaro's victory and here the protagonism is again on the part of the judiciary. Today it is public knowledge that Brazilian magistrates such as Sérgio Moro, the all-powerful judge, commander of Operation Car Wash, who almost destroyed Petrobras and the country's respected heavy-construction industry, were trained in the United States and equipped with the tools of so-called *lawfare*. Nor is it by chance that one of the first measures of Temer's government was the modification of some rules of the oil regime, allowing a greater role for big global oil companies. The PT in power, in a republican way, was the party which created the most mechanisms and institutions to combat corruption, but these mechanisms and institutions turned completely against it. Members of the upper courts, in their vast majority chosen by Lula and Dilma, have repeatedly voted against the PT and against Lula, even though there was abundant evidence that, in the majority of the cases, to follow the law would be to decide otherwise.

**SP:** Certainly the legacy of slavery, oligarchic governments, military dictatorship and economic underdevelopment in Brazilian history - all of which involved massive amounts of corruption justified by the judicial and political forces of the dominant classes - explains why it is still a relevant political

issue today. When wielded by the right, the anti-corruption banner often takes on reactionary meanings, yet the left in Brazil has often confused corruption with morality, failing to consider specific historical forces and class struggles.

As Benjamin Glyn Fogel argues, in recent Brazilian history, there are two types of anti-corruption arguments both of which are profoundly antidemocratic: 1) 'technocratic anti-corruption' touted by the World Bank which contends that politics needs to be controlled by responsible elites rather than citizens; and 2) 'populist anti-corruption' that contributes to 'anti-politics': the idea that democratic politics cannot change anything and that only supposed outsiders can end corruption. The successful Bolsonaro election campaign falls into the second category.

The populist anti-corruption campaign waged against the PT by the conservative judiciary, right-wing social movements, traditional and new conservative parties and the corporate media is really only a façade to justify attacks against the social-democratic politics of the PT. Indeed, against any semblance of left-wing politics. Shrill anti-corruption tirades often serve as stand-ins for critiques of quotas for black, Indigenous and poor students in universities, for example, or for full labour rights for domestic workers.

Yet the far-left must not lose sight of the fact that it was the politics of neoliberal conciliation that led the PT in the first place to engage in questionable practices with centrist and right-wing parties and, especially, corrupt corporate officials. So it must convince people that the question of corruption is not a moral question, but a political one. And it must also advance political struggles to accomplish political reforms and egalitarian social policies that are the real solution to combatting corruption.

*7. Jair Bolsonaro, a former military officer and then marginal figure in the Chamber of Deputies beginning in 1991, will assume the Brazilian presidency in January 2019. How did Bolsonaro rise from near-total obscurity to the presidency in such a truncated period of time? What are the key social forces that aligned behind Bolsonaro in his bid for the presidency, and why do they support him?*

**LA:** That is the question that remains unanswered. How can we explain this situation? What the left can do for now is tap into some elements and processes that allowed him to win. The first is related to what I have said previously: the PT's development model had reached its limit. That is not safe to state unequivocally after the Temer administration because Lula – despite being in jail – would probably have been elected if he had been able to run for president. But there was a backlash against the PT's development model – and I do not agree that it was just from the middle class.

Second, Bolsonaro has managed to create for himself the image of a non-corrupt politician – although it is so fragile that it seems to be falling apart even before his inauguration.

Third, something happened to Brazil's political education. Some would say it was due to fake news and newly-created false realities. To me, this explanation seems far from sufficient. There is no doubt the facts were extremely manipulated, both in mainstream media and in the new resources used to reach voters through social media. But there is something more serious and difficult to explain. Offering a lifeline out of the crisis, and into economic recovery and order, state violence has won. Brazil has always been a repressive, police state, but it will now be backed by 50 million voters. In addition, history has been wiped out, as ironically and sadly reflected in the fire in the Brazilian National Museum. While the media was showing the restoration projects for the historic building, it became apparent that what had really burned was the actual history of Brazil, always silenced and obfuscated. It is worth noting the very existence of slavery and the need for protection policies and justice for Indigenous peoples are now open to discussion! We have elected a president who said on



live TV that the Portuguese never set foot in Africa and blacks were submitted to slavery by blacks themselves. He openly supports the use of torture during the dictatorship and even today, and articulates a bizarre nationalist discourse according to which all of Brazil's dilemmas will be resolved with a bullet. What is clear is that the defence of democracy is not in the limelight and there is a longing for order and security above all. However, we should recall that the situation is so complex that Lula would probably have been elected if he had run for president.

Some key points help explain how we have got to where we are. Our financialised agribusiness elite with its always present heritage of slavery has intertwined its financial interests with the backlash from different segments of society. There is a backlash against controversial values such as gender definitions, the role of women, LGBT freedom, etc. Blacks' achievements in recent decades have been driven by the quota system and increased racial representativeness, as well as by higher income and greater access to consumer goods and services for those remaining at the bottom of the career ladder – mostly black. The current backlash is based on both a denial of structural racism and a flimsy meritocracy-discourse that denies Brazil's brutal racial inequality. In addition, the middle class, which benefited the least from the PT's model, is increasingly proletarianised. Social movements are present on the outskirts of major cities, but neo-Pentecostal churches also engage actively in the grassroots effort. In addition, the power of drug gangs and vigilante groups – the so-called 'militias' –, which control the periphery of large cities and (God knows to what extent) the very state itself, is growing.

Concerning political parties and their relationship with Bolsonaro, we do have to start by pointing the finger at the left-wing parties and even the rightwing parties, such as the PSDB, which chose to focus on their strategies and electoral practices, with the 2022 election already in mind, instead of forming a coalition against the militarised far-right. In fact, the Establishment, which rose victorious from the impeachment, is being swallowed by the Bolsonaro wave and has to surf it, still unsafely despite the agreements being made.

That said, we can look at the forces that sustain Bolsonaro. A few years from now, we will probably see this shift to the right and the coups in Latin America as we see the dictatorships of the 1960s today. We must bring imperialism back into the discussion to come to grips with the interests of the centre – however we can define it today – and their role in those processes. This is more and more challenging since there is a fine line between local and international interests in a capitalist system becoming increasingly monopolised worldwide. We can identify four specific forces sustaining him: agribusiness, Evangelical churches, the military and financial groups interested in the management and privatisation of education, social security and the environment. However, none of those groups is homogeneous, nor do their interests necessarily converge. There is a direct attack on values and customs under dispute and in transition. We have a white administration made up of conservative chauvinistic men. They defend the usual interests of agribusiness – from environmental permits, the elimination of Indigenous rights and protections to the killing of political activists; there are projects to privatise and financialise social rights; and there is ... the military. Does the military still have a nationalist development project? Does this still make sense? Considering Bolsonaro represents the dungeons of the dictatorship, it is not yet clear what role the military is willing to play and sustain in this administration since it is not a homogenous group, either.

**RA:** The first electoral option for the dominant class in the 2018 elections focused on a centre-right candidacy (PDSB) with a base that the party had been establishing since 1994 when they elected FHC. But that candidacy failed. Incapable of growing in the electoral polls and with Lula (while still in prison) leading in the polls, the main opposition groups changed their course and ran, almost up to the nights leading up to the election, in the direction of the only candidate that could defeat Lula (or any other candidate supported by Lula).

The only available candidate was Bolsonaro. It was either Bolsonaro or the 'PT's return'. But for these purposes, the ruling classes made a demand: knowing that they were dealing with a completely unprepared candidate, it was essential to provide him with an ultra-neoliberal economic team that would guarantee that their economic programme would be implemented. The fact that Bolsonaro defends ultraconservative and neofascist values was easily amenable to the Brazilian dominant class which never had any beacon of democracy. And this 'new' candidate had the support of the armed forces which would guarantee 'political stability'. Nevertheless, it would be necessary to have someone with the army's backing on the presidential ballot, which came with Bolsonaro's vice-presidential candidate General Hamilton Mourão.

The political engineering was established: a candidate who was deeply influenced by the dictatorship with a military background, and who had the support of the working class that had until recently been supporting the PT. The working class was deeply disillusioned by the unemployment rate, loss of rights, and lack of social perspective. Bolsonaro knew how to channel the hatred of the many groups opposing the PT and had the support of the Evangelicals and their 'prosperity gospel'. Bolsonaro is also an intransigent defender of family values. Throughout his nearly thirty years in parliament, his speeches and public rhetoric were always very aggressive towards 'minorities' (blacks, women, LGBT). In addition, Bolsonaro is an intransigent defender of the military dictatorship and its practices of torture. These, among other attributes, compose the ideology of this new far-right variation.

The knife attack on Bolsonaro before the primary elections exponentially increased the 'messiah' factor of his candidacy, and he was seen as a true saviour of Brazil; victimising his candidacy would make him the only candidate capable of preventing the return of the 'extremist' PT. And this political incident, the attack, became the contingent element that was vital to Bolsonaro's victory. It was the missing element that allowed him to 'justify' his absence in all the public electoral debates, allowing his silence to become a trump card in his victory. And, because of this, he was the candidate that appeared in the media the most because there were updates on his recovery at all times, and these reports always praised his strength and resilience. The monumental use of social media in the election, illegally paid for by the dominant-class Bolsonaro supporters (a successful experiment that had previously allowed Trump to be elected) was the final act that made the far-right victorious in Brazil.

**MB:** After the coup over Dilma's government, through the impeachment, the extent of social devastation (galloping unemployment, increasing extreme poverty, public-services crises etc.) and the unpopularity of the Temer administration's austerity measures left no space that could allow the traditional political parties of the dominant class - which were all supporting Temer - to create a strong electoral alternative for the 2018 elections. That was apparent in the public-opinion polls which, as I mentioned, in the course of the first half-year of 2018 showed the majority intended to vote for ex-president Lula da Silva, the PT's candidate. To remove any possibility of an electoral victory of the PT candidate the second act of the coup d'état was accelerated through Lula's arrest, with unprecedented haste, and his imprisonment on a charge of corruption based on very fragile proof.

However, even with Lula da Silva impeded from disputing the elections, the candidates of the parties in power did not prove to be electorally viable and Bolsonaro advanced into the vacuum created by the crisis of legitimacy that ensued from the coup. He claimed the anti-corruption and anti-PT mobilisations as his own, presenting himself as an outsider even though he had been holding a seat in the parliament for almost thirty years, elected under the aegis of various parties, all of them involved in corruption scandals.

Much has been said about Bolsonaro's electoral campaign methods, which circumvented the

traditional communication media and instead made intense use of social-media networks, message-diffusing apps and an abundance of fake news. It is also well known that Bolsonaro has begun to share the conservative agendas associated to the bloc of parliamentarians elected by the strength of their positions of command in neo-Pentecostal churches. This is especially true for those of them which attack education in Brazil, alleging that 'communist indoctrination' dominates teaching practices and that the school environment is responsible for the diffusion of a 'gender ideology' which confronts 'traditional family' values. That kind of agenda and the support of the churches played a central role in his campaign. Less has been said, however, about the use of violence, especially in the weeks leading up to the second round of the elections when there was a clear attempt to intimidate supporters of Fernando Haddad's candidature.

However important those elements may be to enable an understanding of the campaign, they are insufficient to explain the correlation of social forces that allowed Bolsonaro to win.

Crisis, or rather, crises are the key to understanding the point at which we have arrived. I have already mentioned elements like the impact of the capitalist crisis in Brazil, especially from 2014 on; the loss of support, from above and from below, for the PT's governments and its class-conciliation ruling model after 2013; and the lack of legitimacy of the traditional ruling-class parties in the sequence of Temer's government. Considering this combination of factors, one may remember the Gramscian notion of 'organic crisis' (with which the idea of 'crisis of hegemony' is associated), when 'social groups become detached from their traditional parties' and 'the ruling class has failed in some major political undertaking for which it has requested, or forcibly extracted the consent of the broad masses'. Following Gramsci's analysis, 'organic crises' open the field for 'violent solutions' and 'men of destiny', in other words, for a Bonapartist (or as he preferred, 'Caesarist') political regime's solution.

**SF:** Bolsonaro was very much underestimated by the Brazilian left. Since his major claims related to conservatism and the armed forces, most of the left just saw him as peculiar far-right politician without much potential. Yet, Bolsonaro knew that to grow politically he could not be simply a conservative, but would have to articulate with Brazil's economic forces as well. A big turning point in his aspirations began when he secured support from liberal organisations, especially through liberal conservatism, by assuring the markets that he would let the bourgeoisie do its own bidding under his government. At the same time, one cannot look at the phenomenon of Bolsonarismo without also examining the role of fundamentalist religious forces in Brazil and how many churches have made it their goal to elect fundamentalist representatives to Congress and to the executive as well. This, coupled with penal populism and an anticommunist stance, which has gained traction through hatred of the PT and a series of moral panics, helped to secure Bolsonaro as more than a far-right candidate. The traditional right is also hurting from his election, since he managed to secure its support base as well. Finally, it is important to note that not even this level of articulation could have fully guaranteed his being elected in the absence of Lula's candidature, were it not also for the role of online discussion, the usage of fake news, and many other tactics that influenced public opinion in 2018. Both the judiciary and cyber-warfare techniques were also useful to Bolsonaro.

**RN:** Like the seven generals in his incoming cabinet, Bolsonaro belongs to a generation that went into the military during the dictatorship and was terribly let down by re-democratisation. While the nostalgia for that period that Bolsonarismo sells is an imaginary construct, for this military inner-circle it is quite real: it's the resentment of those who were denied the future they expected. When he started, Bolsonaro represented that nostalgia for a lost future: his original electoral base was the families of military and police, and his mediocre legislative career was essentially a conduit for their corporatist interests. In a way, we're witnessing the revenge of the low-ranking officers of the late 1970s against the guerrilla fighters of the early 1970s who came to power with the PT.

Despite seven terms in parliament, Bolsonaro was only ever a fringe figure, although one the media liked because of his news-grabbing 'polemical' (read 'bigoted and occasionally criminal') remarks. This began to change in the last five years, for three reasons. First, the rising anti-systemic mood favoured a 'straight talker' like him, and having been a bit-part player all his life, he could lay claim to outsiderdom. Second, as I explained above, the far-right was in a better position to take advantage of the conjuncture than anyone else. Third, the traditional right, with support from the media, had been mainstreaming far-right discourse for almost a decade, as they had realised at the height of Lula's success that moral panics and 'red scares' were the only things making a dent in the PT's popularity. Add to that the institutional anomie created by the impeachment and the judiciary's erratic interventionism; the unpopularity of the Temer government, toxic to all who participated in it; and the growing sense of insecurity caused by the economic crisis and a rise in criminality. It was a perfect storm.

Yet Bolsonaro wouldn't have had the explicit support or unspoken assent of the business and political elites if he'd stayed faithful to the economic nationalism and statism that he carried from his military roots. It was his encounter with the future 'superminister' of finance, Paulo Guedes, an investment banker with a PhD in economics from Chicago, that clinched the deal. Not one for deep-set policy convictions, Bolsonaro incorporated the ultraliberal programme of his so-called 'guru' lock, stock and barrel. That made him viable in the eyes of the establishment, whose preferred candidate was a non-starter. Finally, although his moral agenda has always brought him close to the Evangelical right, it was only when the momentum behind his candidacy became unstoppable that Pentecostal leaders - who are nothing if not pragmatic - rallied behind him in full force. With that and the rejection that Haddad inherited from Lula, plus a disinformation war waged via WhatsApp, the result was a foregone conclusion.

As in other places, we can explain this turn to the right as caused by two different kinds of anxiety, one related to the loss of rights, the other to the loss of privileges. There is a huge overlap between the two, obviously, so that many people come to associate one to the other: 'if my life is getting worse, it's because of all these things minorities are gaining'. But it also allows us to draw a distinction, even if only tendentially, between those for whom the loss of rights is the main issue, and those for whom it is the loss of privileges. We find Bolsonaro's core ideological vote among the latter, mostly rich and upper middle class: people who want even the timid transformations of the last decade reversed, and who desire law and order, traditional values and so on. This was the social base for the pro-impeachment protests. The other vote flocked to Bolsonaro this time, but its bond with him is more circumstantial. It includes Evangelicals, people worried about crime and the economic crisis, those who are fed up with the system and see Bolsonaro as a breath of fresh air. Many of these have voted PT in the past.

**LP:** Some of the reasons for Bolsonaro's victory have already been listed, the main one being the ban on Lula competing (even with the United Nations warning that he should not lose his political rights). Although he continues to represent an already worn-out centre-left party, Lula is a unique historical figure, in virtue of his life trajectory, for having created the PT, for having been president of the country for eight years, for having only a few years of formal schooling, for having taken 30 million people out of misery, for having withdrawn the country from the map of famine, and for having given Brazil a protagonist role on the geopolitical plane that it would never have imagined to have. Together with his strongly charismatic personality, he would be the only one able to defeat all the forces that allied themselves to destroy the left and to elect this sinister character.

However, other elements must be considered. Despite the success in terms of growth, employment and inequality-reduction achieved by PT governments without affecting the interests of the wealthy, the country's elites, still extremely manorial, never accepted the party nor its greater leader, Lula. The sense of 'loss' of power settled and, in the case of the upper middle classes, this feeling was

magnified by the public policies of PT governments, which placed the poorest in spaces previously exclusive to the elites: airports, universities, the upmarket malls. Finally, combined with the enormous rise of Pentecostal churches and their theology of prosperity (not estranged from the ideology of neoliberalism, quite the contrary!), the lack of political consciousness on the very part of the population which benefited from the policies and programmes implemented by PT governments concerning these same policies and programmes (because of the fault of the PT itself) was decisive in the totally uncritical acceptance of the tsunami of fake news originating from Bolsonaro's campaign against the PT candidate in the second round, Fernando Haddad – that he would encourage incest, that he would have raped an 11-yearold girl, to mention only two of the countless lies about him that were being persistently propagated by thousands of web bots (whose internet links indicated the USA as their home).

**SP:** Bolsonaro was able to exploit the very real, if frequently exaggerated, history of corruption by PT governments and the grave economic crisis, utilising a highly orchestrated campaign of fake news about the economic policies and social positions of the left and enjoying the tacit and implicit backing of the corporate media and many traditionally corrupt parties. Distressed after six years of severe recession and high unemployment, and buying into the supposed 'anti-politics' and 'corruption-free' campaign of Bolsonaro, many believed that he offered a fresh alternative. The PT erred in launching Haddad as the candidate late in the process, and despite tacking to the left during the campaign was unable to turn a tide which had begun months earlier. In any case, the PT was already thoroughly discredited among the majority of the population and the far-left was unable to overcome its divisions and inability to pose a strong left alternative.

From 2016 until the present, the centre and right under the illegitimate president Michel Temer have consistently shifted the terrain of politics in the country, advancing outright austerity politics, cuts to social programmes and attacks on the social rights of the LGBT population, blacks and women. It was in this climate that Marielle Franco, a black bisexual activist and city councillor in Rio de Janeiro for PSOL, was brutally murdered in March 2018 along with her driver, Anderson Gomes.

Deepening racist and anti-poor, law-and-order politics and the ruinous incarceration policy – something which the PT governments did nothing to change or even encouraged – proved to be a strong point in Bolsonaro's campaign. He has promised to liberalise the personal use of guns, a disastrous policy in a country where 64,000 people were murdered in 2017. Not surprisingly, the number of people murdered by the police, disproportionately poor and black, has risen steeply since 2016.

*8. How should we characterise the incoming Bolsonaro regime? Does it make sense to see this as, at least potentially, a form of fascism adapted to the specificities of the twenty-first century Brazilian context? However we characterise the incoming administration, what are the strategic priorities of the Brazilian left in the coming months and years?*

**LA:** A sort of panic swept through the left after the election. We must also consider the ongoing increase of suicide among militants, which started even before that. But pretty soon it became clear that there is a subjective war against any movement that may be labelled left-wing. Note how history is being wiped out and all the references are being mixed together under the label of 'cultural Marxism', as the president, the president's sons and the future Minister of Education refer to all social movements and left-wing theories. Gender, class, race and socialism finally meet to be exterminated. Bewildering the resistance is a military strategy adopted since the Temer administration. One thing seems certain: an attempt to destroy the PT completely through judicial means or financial sanctions. But it should be noted that the PT is still a very powerful social force. In addition to Lula's strength, the PT elected the largest number of Lower House members and some governors in this election.

I do not know whether we can call this fascism. It makes no sense to me to say that in these days we have over 50 million supporters of fascism. We have a president-elect with a cabinet made up of people from the military, Evangelical churches, the financial market and agribusiness. We are aware that the contradictions of the capitalist system require solutions increasingly based on 'democratic dictatorships'. The managerial left's sun has set. Now it is time for the left to reinvent itself and face the typhoon. Every left-wing militant died a little when Marielle Franco was executed. Now the left has to devise different ways to protect itself, even subjectively. But there is also a banalised numbing - which affects the left itself - to the rising number of militants killed in the countryside, to fires and murders in favelas, to soaring real-estate prices and to the daily extermination of black youths in the periphery of large cities. What is preposterous is that this typhoon did not form yesterday. State violence and brutal social inequality are structural in Brazil, but the point is that their destructive power has now grown to unprecedented proportions. The strategic priority is unity. Whether or not it will come, only time will tell.

**RA:** Politically, Bolsonaro is similar to Orbán (Hungary), Duterte (the Philippines), and inspired by Trump. But his trademark is inconsistency, imbalance, and unchecked come-and-go. The 'myth', as his followers call it, has clear neofascist components. His cabinet has several military-reserve ministers, possibly a 'demand' made by the military. His party (PSL) is a chaotic and unprepared organisation with ultraconservative values and neo-Pentecostalism as their uniting factors. For that reason, infighting and discord have already begun. The press has already pointed out elements that could suggest deep corruption within Bolsonaro's political circle. Therefore unpredictability is the only possible characteristic that can be reported with any surety right now.

His administration will certainly be far-right and ultraconservative. His cabinet is 'medieval' to say the least. He is averse to the poor and black populations, he is a misogynist, he finds the LGBT movement repugnant, and he is against giving the Indigenous community autonomy, among other regressive platforms. Whether these propositions will or won't be implemented will depend on the capability of the workers and social movements (feminist, youth, black, Indigenous, environmentalist, etc.) and the unions, leftist parties, to resist and put forth efforts that can effectively hinder the 'fascistisation' of the government.

On the left, they will have to reinvent themselves. There has to be a twofold movement. On one hand, they must organise an ample gamut of social and political efforts with a strong sense of unity and resistance to every autocratic act of the new government. They must tirelessly fight against these acts to the best of their abilities.

But there's an even more-important aspect to consider. As we saw during the June 2013 protests, there is a frontal challenge to institutionality, which raises a few questions: will the social and political leftists be able to change their course, which until now has been centrally maintained in the institutional sphere? With their electoral timetables and pursuing alliances that are 'always necessary' for victory, in the end, what if nothing changes substantially? Will they be capable of offering a new alternative that dismantles the dominant institutionality of today that exists in a completely separate space from the daily lives of the working class, the social movements, and the periphery?

But what is the starting point? Social movements find their vitality in the bonds tying them to their everyday lives. But because of their specificity, they tend to encounter difficulties foreseeing other societal structures outside of capital. In turn, the unions align themselves more closely with the immediate interests of the working class, which limits comprehension of *totality* and feelings of *class belonging*. The leftist parties have designed their projects envisioning an anti-capitalist future, but they are frequently distanced from the *class that is living pay-checke to pay-checke*. *The main challenge will be to unite these three tools of social and political life.*

For these purposes, the central focus of the fight must be found in another place different from that which has dominated and exhausted the leftists. The biggest challenge is to unite the possible bonds of organic unity between the tools that compose the sociopolitical mosaic without the previous hierarchies but still stemming from the concrete and daily actions that facilitate advancement toward a new, organic social unity and a new *way of life* that is effectively emancipated.

**MB:** There can be no doubt that Bolsonaro is a fascist. The content of his declarations over the last 30 years, and even during the recent election campaign, have involved all kinds of praise for violence, including torture and the military dictatorship, and have been strongly filled with misogyny, LGBTQI-phobia, racism and xenophobia. Not to mention the demonisation of the left and social movements and his litany in favour of more armed violence as a solution to armed violence. In the last five years, he and his sons (also parliamentarians but in different spheres) have made intense use of social media to diffuse hate-messages on those themes. The combination of him more recently joining the Evangelical moral conservative agenda and ultra-liberal economic programme was the way he could gain access to both the votes from groups of low-wage workers in the peripheral areas of big cities and the support of fractions of the ruling class – in particular from agribusiness – even though he was not the first option of the ruling class as a whole.

However, the election of a fascist does not mean that, from 1 January 2019 when he takes office, we will see the immediate installation of a fascist regime in Brazil. Right now, it is not easy to define with any accuracy what institutional forms the Brazilian state will take under Bolsonaro's presidency, but it is possible to foresee an accentuation of the political regime's Bonapartist features. We will have more generals in the ministry than during the years of dictatorship. The intensification of repression aimed at social movements and left-organisations is on the table and it will probably be the main resource to contain the inevitable resistance against the social damage caused by the deepening of economic-austerity measures.

The left will have to build lines of defence in such a reactionary situation. The first one by making broader fronts in defence of democratic rights, which are already being attacked. There are parliamentary discussions on defining social movements' actions as terrorist threats and on limitations of academic freedom in schools and universities, for example. It will also be fundamental to build united fronts between all left-parties (which includes the PT), unions and social movements in order to stop the attacks that will come from the government against working-class social rights and against the organisations and the movements themselves. However, we also have the challenge of building these fronts without losing our political autonomy and the strategic aim of creating the conditions for the emergence of a radical left alternative to the PT and its class-conciliation project.

**SF:** Bolsonaro and his clan espouse fascist principles, which, in the twenty-first century, also means trying to combine the more antidemocratic and anti-communist elements of fascism with liberal economic approaches. His choices of ministers already point to this combination, with liberals, military men and fundamentalist bigots aligned in each strategic sector. If he is able to achieve this equilibrium, he will manage to please most of the political forces that elected him. The problem, for him, is that it will also have very complicated impacts on the economy, even from a liberal standpoint, and affect negatively his working-class voters. If this does happen, Bolsonaro will have to choose whether to employ more coercion to keep his government stable, which will hold the key to the question of whether a fascist President with a far-right government will actually implement, at some point, a fascist government.

It is clear that whether outright fascist or not, his government will be more authoritarian and invest more in the criminalisation of social movements than the previous presidents. PT members are worried about what this means for the legal status of the party, whereas the radical left is also concerned about the possibilities for engaging in direct action under a government elected to be

truculent against criminals and reds. To deal with this, the left has to focus its actions on building a solid opposition base and sowing solidarity in spaces the left has either abandoned or neglected in the recent past. This would mean quite a shift considering that both the moderate and the radical left have, in general, spent the last five years equating political action with street mobilisation, as meagre as the protests usually were. To mobilise the streets under Bolsonaro will be a challenge of its own, but it might help the left realise that the streets cannot be both a starting point and an end-point for organising, but a means useful to channel base-building work into more solid and well-established leftist political organisations.

**RN:** This government will continue the recomposition of the Brazilian elite that began under Temer, in which sectors that collaborated with and profited massively from the PT administrations have seemingly decided that even that level of conciliation is unacceptable and moved towards creating a much more aggressive regime of value extraction. Although comparisons with the likes of Duterte, Orbán and Erdoğan have been floated, it might make more sense to see this as a middle term between those regimes and something like Mario Monti's premiership in Italy. This means that it's less about installing a new economic elite than a pact between the existing elite (especially finance and the commodity sector), who are given total control over the economy, and a new political elite that are happy to outsource policy in exchange for being retained as managers. This will translate into further reduction of labour rights and increased precarisation, the defunding and privatisation of public services, the rollback of environmental protections and Indigenous rights, and an ultraliberal economic programme. In short: a new round of accumulation by dispossession and the creation of a legal framework entrenching highly predatory capitalism.

That is the short-term plan. In the longer run, the idea is to ensure that something like PT or 2013 can never happen again; the impeachment was already about that. This means increased criminalisation of social movements, giving free rein to private militias, heavy use of 'culture war' tactics and the reversal of positive trends in education – expansion of access to universities and changes to curricula – that have led, among other things, to the flourishing feminist, black and LGBTQ movements we've seen in recent years. This is why denunciations of 'cultural Marxism' and paranoia around feminist and gay 'indoctrination' are key weapons in the new regime's ideological arsenal.

In short, the government will be divided into areas reserved for bare-faced pillage (finance, environment, agriculture, energy), those that are reserved for ideology (culture and the new 'Ministry for Families'), and those that will be a combination of the two (education and health, in which the private sector will roll in at full throttle).

The problem is, of course, that the programme that the ruling elite supported Bolsonaro to implement is in direct contradiction with the needs and interests of his middle-class and poor voters, and that tension will surface eventually. This is something the left must try to exploit with a vision that actually speaks to present conditions and the population's real problems, rather than stoking the embers of early 2000s nostalgia or trying to subsume the defence of people's livelihoods under a 'Free Lula' banner. The risk is that the government will try to compensate by turning up the ideology, radicalising its violent, punitivist aspects and railing against 'internal enemies' to be eliminated. It is a given that political violence will rise in the coming years, but things can be even worse.

The fascism question is generally a moot one for lack of a consensual definition of what 'fascism' is, so I would just say this: regardless of what we call the new regime, there is absolutely no doubt that fascist desires are a part of the package, and that Bolsonarismo stirs them deliberately. It remains to be seen how much of that, if any, was just for campaigning purposes. But this element is definitely there, and will tend to come into play whenever the new rulers find themselves cornered.



**LP:** If we consider fascism as the combination of authoritarianism (contempt for democracy), extreme nationalism and a belief in hierarchical values and in the elites' domain, the Brazilian fascism of Jair Bolsonaro is peculiar. There is, in fact, enormous appreciation for authority and little appreciation for individual freedoms and democratic values; there is also the belief that some groups are naturally superior to others (men to women, whites to blacks and Indians, heterosexuality to LGBTQI); there is, finally, *et pour cause*, enormous hatred of politicians, parties and left-wing thinking. However, our 'Tropical Trump', unlike the original version, is nationalist only in speech, because, in addition to saluting the American flag and American politicians, he has a radically liberal government programme, foreseeing broad privatisations and selling-off of national patrimony, including strategic natural resources such as minerals, oil and even water to big international groups. In short, in economic terms, the Bolsonaro government should be characterised by its in-depth continuity with the Temer government: privatisations, assets delivery, austerity policy at any price, and more cuts in workers' rights.

Finally, in our tropical fascism, there is an enormous weight of religion (the Evangelical religion, in this case), with the consequent moralistic preaching and its implications for freedom of thought and for scientific knowledge itself (it is no accident that the person nominated as the future chancellor claims that the environmental problem is an 'invention of Marxists'). Bolsonaro himself has already questioned the idea of a secular state and the motto of his electoral campaign was 'Brazil above all else, God above all.' Therefore, I believe that, in this anti-civilising earthquake, education and the university are at risk, because, in the absence of rapid positive results in the economy (which will hardly come), some 'attraction' will have to be offered to those who gave their vote to Bolsonaro and this may well be the ideological witch hunt, our national McCarthyism. The Brazilian left, organised or not into parties, has to be reborn from the ashes and resist. It needs to learn from this sad episode a historical lesson: not to dissociate from its bases, on pain of being swept away from the political map of Brazil.

**SP:** I believe there are certainly elements of neo-fascism in the new government adapted to the local Brazilian context in 2018. There is no organised fascist party or movement and the vast majority of Bolsonaro's electors are not fascist. The context between the rise of fascism in Europe in the 1920s – in the wake of the Russian revolution – is quite different from the current Brazilian context.

Yet as Valerio Arcary has shown, there are multiple elements of a neofascism in the Bolsonaro phenomenon: middle-class social origins; armed forces background; hatred of the organised working class, social movements and the oppressed; a far-right economic, social and political ideology; the support of key sections of the ruling class; and an exalted nationalism.

It is highly likely that the honeymoon traditional for new presidents will be short-lived. Bolsonaro has not even assumed office and has already come under intense fire from the press, the opposition and even from some of his supporters for breaking campaign promises and cozying up to the traditional corrupt political class in Brazil. There is strong evidence emerging that he, his wife and his sons recently engaged in corrupt practices.

However, the principal question in relation to a Bolsonaro government will be his inability to solve the economic crisis, which could provide space for the mobilisation of the organised working class. But this will require sustained arguments from union militants against the ossified union bureaucracy largely controlled by the PT. There will be a tension between the neoliberal policies which he has recently adopted and support among many of his voters for decent social programmes, job creation and labour rights.

International solidarity will be essential for Brazilian unions, social movements and the left in the coming months and years. A Bolsonaro regime needs to be denounced by the international workers'

movement, the left, all democrats and supporters of human, labour and social rights.

*Responses by Ricardo Antunes were translated from Portuguese by Kelsey Trotta.*

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**P.S.**

Historical Materialism (2019) 1-63