

Interview

Lula's return. Two years of PT rule (Israel Dutra)

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Interview. Nearly two years after Lula's return to power as President of Brazil, Israel Dutra, a member of the leadership of MES (Socialist Left Movement) and PSOL (Socialism and Liberty Party) of Brazil, provides us with an overview of the social and political situation.

NPA - Could you provide an assessment of the recent municipal elections in Brazil at the end of 2024, particularly regarding the left's results?

Israel Dutra - The outcome of October's municipal elections strengthened the formation of the so-called "centrão" forces, which in reality is not a centrist current but rather a right-wing sector that allies itself sometimes with the government, sometimes with the more conservative opposition...

Four main elements can be highlighted:

- A strong tendency to re-elect incumbent mayors, due to the manipulation of public funds, electoral funds, public investments and other advantages concentrated in the hands of those already in municipal government;
- Significant mass movement apathy, increased by abstention and the number of blank and void votes; there were no major events or mass gatherings during the electoral period. The weight of public financing (a billion-dollar fund for all parties) also caused a distortion between the large number of people paid by major parties to campaign and the militant majority of others, reducing space for voluntary work and spontaneous action;
- Within the right and far-right, the result was more contradictory. While the far-right gained positions, with posts for mayors and city councillors, Bolsonaro was more questioned as a leader, while new right-wing sectors emerged regionally. The strengthening of parties linked to the "centrão", such as the MDB (Brazilian Democratic Movement) and PSD (Social Democratic Party), demonstrates this trend;
- The left in general, and particularly the PT (Workers' Party) and PSOL when allied with PT, was weakened, as was the case in São Paulo and Belém (where PSOL lost the mayoralty).

Nevertheless, PSOL maintains significant influence, securing important electoral victories, maintaining and even increasing its number of councillors in the main capitals. The Porto Alegre election—where PSOL won a seat, even though the PT candidate lost in the second round—is an example.

What about the campaign to imprison Bolsonaro following the publication of the federal police report on the attempted coup of 8 January 2023?

After the elections, the national situation underwent major changes. Besides the emergence of young proletarian sectors (which we'll discuss later), Bolsonaro and his associates found themselves in an increasingly difficult position with the revelation of coup plans including the assassination of Lula, Vice President Alckmin, and Supreme Court Minister Alexandre de Moraes. The violence and improvisation of these plans, which were revealed by the federal police, accusing 37 people, including Bolsonaro, sparked great indignation among the population. Unfortunately, there haven't been large mobilisations for this campaign. We advocated for the immediate arrest of Bolsonaro and all coup perpetrators, including political leaders, activists, and even business leaders.

What are the major current struggles? Could you specifically discuss the "VAT", the Pepsico strike, and the fight against the "6 × 1"?

The "good news" comes from the workplaces. A movement has formed against the 6 × 1 regime (6 days worked, 1 day rest)—which is the current working pattern in most cases—demanding a reduction in the working week. This movement has been organised and centralised by a national movement called "VAT" (Vida Além do Trabalho, "Life Beyond Work") whose main leader is Rick Azevedo, PSOL's most successfully elected councillor in Rio de Janeiro. A national rally was organised on 15 November and brought thousands of people, particularly young people, to the streets to pressure for the passage of the working time reduction bill through Parliament. The online petition has gathered over 3 million signatures.

Meanwhile, employees of the multinational Pepsico (Pepsicola) conducted a large-scale strike for nine days, giving national resonance to the struggle against the 6 × 1 regime. This strike was exemplary because, although it didn't achieve significant results—only victories on some of the initial demands—it put the struggle for working day reduction on the agenda.

What about other social movements, the landless, the homeless?

We are in a period of major retreat for social movements, with many sectors on the defensive. There are major demands, motivated by inequalities in the country. The MST (Landless Workers' Movement) has adopted a more critical tone towards government measures, both regarding agrarian reform and environmental issues. This is justified, as there is an increasing impression that the federal government's choices regarding the economic agenda are a continuation of the [IMF] adjustment, such as the package that the Ministry of Finance wants to approve, which includes budget cuts in several social areas. This is absurd, and we are campaigning against these cuts.

Moreover, the environmental movement is beginning to organise its mobilisation for a decisive year, as in 2025 we will have COP30 in Brazil, in the heart of the Amazon. And social movements will organise an extensive parallel programme of mobilisation and debates.

What are Minister Haddad's budgetary austerity measures? Who opposes them and proposes to fight them?

Finance Minister Haddad's proposal is being met with euphoria by the bankers' federation (Febraban). It consists of following the so-called "spending ceiling", which has been configured by the so-called "new fiscal framework", which is nothing more than a model that avoids public spending in order to continue paying debt securities.

The concrete result is reducing benefits for the poorest (people needing social assistance) and freezing civil servants' salaries, as well as reducing minimum wage growth for several years.

Four weeks ago, we launched, along with political leaders, intellectuals, and social leaders, a

manifesto against this package of measures, which has continued to gain strength and support. To emerge from the budget crisis, we would need to tax the wealthiest, fight against privileges, tackle excessive bank profits and reopen the debate on public debt.

What are the reactions regarding the Mercosur-European Union agreement?

Brazil has fundamental weight in a series of international political agreements with geopolitical impact. Lula's position, for example on Palestine, denouncing what is happening in Gaza and the West Bank as genocide, was correct and important.

Recently, we had meetings such as the G20 in Brazil. Next year, COP30 will be held in the Amazon. It was within this framework that the agreement between the European Union and Mercosur was announced, under strong protests from countries like France.

The government celebrated the Mercosur-European Union agreement as a victory, but social movements express strong reservations. Particularly within the MST and Via Campesina, according to their leaders, this would lead to a European recolonisation of Mercosur countries. It would result in strengthening the historical, oppressive, and predatory model of agro-export monoculture. It would be a step in the "reprimarisation" based on four major economic sectors: agricultural products, minerals, livestock, and cellulose. The issue of tariffs in relation to national industrial sectors raises concerns.

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