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Brazil's pseudo-left pushes for social media censorship ahead of presidential run-off

Less than ten days before Brazil's presidential run-off, Jair Bolsonaro, a fascistic former army captain, continues to widen his lead against Workers Party (PT) candidate Fernando Haddad, the former mayor of Sao Paulo, with the latest polls giving him 50 percent of the vote compared to 35 percent for his opponent.

Over the weekend, rallies called to oppose Bolsonaro were sparsely attended, with only a few thousand demonstrating in Sao Paulo—their numbers dwarfed by a far larger Bolsonaro rally—and only hundreds in other Brazilian cities. The turnout made it clear that the PT has neither the desire nor the ability to mobilize working class opposition to the far-right candidate. Instead of appealing to the workers, it is concentrating its efforts on winning the support of the Brazilian bourgeoisie and state, as well as that of international finance capital.

This orientation has come into clear focus with the reaction to a report in *Folha de S. Paulo*, Brazil's most widely circulated newspaper, on the possible use of mass messaging on Whatsapp, a practice forbidden by Brazilian electoral law, by the Bolsonaro campaign. On Thursday, October 18, *Folha de S. Paulo* reported that a network of companies whose owners support the fascistic candidate had hired mass Whatsapp messaging services using third-party personal databases, a practice which would violate Brazilian electoral law on three counts.

The first count would be the use of undeclared funds, since Bolsonaro's campaign did not acknowledge the practice to the Electoral Court. The second would be receiving company

donations, which is forbidden—parties have at their disposal an electoral fund appropriated by Congress and roughly split according to number of members and representation. Finally, electoral laws allow mass messaging only to social media users who explicitly relay their data to the candidate’s campaign, forbidding the use of commercial databases.

The *Folha* report did not disclose any evidence to support the allegations, but both the Electoral Court and the Attorney General’s office opened investigations into the claims, having considered them plausible. Whatsapp has taken sweeping action against Bolsonaro supporters and at least four marketing companies mentioned as those hired for the mass messaging operation, blocking the companies’ accounts and those of “hundreds of thousands of others,” according to a press release.

The most sweeping and right-wing stance, however, was taken not by the Brazilian State or any communications monopoly, but by Brazil’s leading pseudo-left organization and Workers Party (PT) apologist, the Socialism and Liberty Party (PSOL), which includes both Morenoite and Pabloite factions. It took less than 24 hours for PSOL’s legal team to ask the Electoral Court to order nothing less than the suspension of Whatsapp services throughout Brazil until election day, October 28.

While the appeal was denied by Electoral Court Justice Edson Fachin, PSOL’s proposed injunction has undeniably exposed the whole pseudo-left “anti-fascist front” as a treacherous operation aimed at disarming workers and blocking any genuine attempt at resistance to, let alone counter-offensive against, the far-right threat embodied by Bolsonaro.

PSOL’s injunction reveals with utmost clarity that the “anti-fascist front,” of which the party casts itself as a standard bearer, has no intention whatsoever of mobilizing the working class, nor even its narrow middle class base, against Bolsonaro.

Instead it demands state repression of the main medium for mass organization in Brazil in recent years, which played a major role in the 2015-2016 wave of school occupations sweeping thousands of facilities countrywide, and more recently in last May’s 300,000-strong truckers’ strike, which was vilified by elements of the pseudo-left as a defense of “male privilege” by the super-exploited truckers.

As the PT has done since the impeachment President Dilma Rousseff in 2016, the “anti-fascist front” is appealing to the bourgeoisie, using as leverage the views expressed by sections of the imperialist powers speaking through the *New York Times*, *Le Monde*, the *Guardian* and the *Economist*. It is demanding that the ruling establishment “come to its

senses” and choose the tried and trusted PT candidate, the neoliberal former São Paulo mayor, Haddad. Its “opposition” to Bolsonaro is to be articulated only through bourgeois press editorials and columnists.

PSOL’s appeal for state repression is only the latest move in a rush to the right by the PT and its pseudo-left satellites, which have been ever more embittered since the PT was ousted in 2016 in the face of working class hostility and indifference toward the party after 13 years of its rule.

The day before *Folha’s* report, the head of Brazil’s main “fact-checking” agency, Lupa, penned a right-wing *New York Times* opinion piece publicly asking Whatsapp to reduce message forwarding from 20 to only five chats or conversations, and limiting the size of groups and message recipients, all in name of fighting “fake news.” Whatsapp had already restricted message forwarding in Brazil in August, in reaction to the truckers’ strike, which had 87 percent support among the population, even in face of widespread shortages of basic goods, from milk to fuel.

At one point, the column, titled “Fake News Is Poisoning Brazilian Politics. WhatsApp Can Stop It,” bemoans the fact that message encryption in the app makes it “difficult to monitor” political interactions. It adds that the app creates the potential for “a small coordinated group being easily able to orchestrate a great campaign” of misinformation—just what the Brazilian intelligence agency said about the motivation for the truckers’ strike.

The appeal for the state to intervene to suppress social media has gone hand-in-hand with the increasingly right-wing turn by the PT in the runoff campaign, as it seeks to garner support from the Brazilian and international bourgeoisie. Since the first round, after ditching the color red, for decades the PT’s trademark, and adopting the same green and yellow “national colors” used by Bolsonaro, Haddad has repeatedly pitched appeals to Catholic voters, aligning himself with the Catholic Church hierarchy by indicting Bolsonaro for “offending the Church, calling it Communist.”

In Latin America, where the church hierarchy, including the Dirty War Pope Francis from Argentina, turned “liberation theology” priests, who were denounced as “communists,” over to the state and far-right terrorism in order to appease military juntas, such a defense of the Catholic church is wholly reactionary.

Even more right-wing have been the PT’s recent attempts to red-bait Bolsonaro himself on Venezuela, with PT’s campaign coordinator Jaques Wagner warning that “we will turn into Venezuela if the PT loses.” The attempt to equate Venezuela with socialism has been

a hallmark of Bolsonaro's campaign, with his son, Eduardo Bolsonaro, a congress member for São Paulo, delivering a fascistic rant to thousands of far-right supporters on Sunday declaring that Brazil's next "peace mission" under Bolsonaro's rule will be "to free Venezuela from socialism."

The PT and its apologists have nothing to offer the Brazilian working class. Business circles are certainly conspiring not only to bring Bolsonaro to power but also to build a mass base for a fascist movement in Brazil. Illegal electoral practices may be an element of this campaign, which is chiefly enabled by the betrayals of the PT. The party has itself regarded Bolsonaro as the "lesser evil" for years, with PT propagandist Breno Altman writing as late as September 23 that facing Bolsonaro in the second round would be "ideal," as the far-right would be "scientifically easier to defeat."

The PT's focus on "fake news" as the reason for its massive rejection in virtually every working-class center that gave the party support for decades is a measure of the party's desperation and alienation from the masses of Brazilian working people. The vote, which included record levels of abstention, represented a referendum on 13 years of PT rule, which culminated in the concerted effort of the Rousseff government to place the full burden of the worst economic crisis in the country's history on the backs of the working class.

The PT and its pseudo-left apologists are driven to promote state censorship, opening the way to Bolsonaro's own authoritarian moves, because they have nothing to offer to the Brazilian working class.

The former battlefields of the most bitter union struggles in the country have given Bolsonaro some of his widest leads. At the same time, the pseudo-left is ever more clearly denying workers' grievances, with PSOL's website recently posting another article slandering workers as reactionaries, called "It's not the economy, stupid"—a right-wing inversion of the famous aphorism of Bill Clinton's campaign strategist in 1992.

The PT has pitched its appeal as well to the military, with Haddad scheduling one of his first meetings following the first-round election with the Gen. Eduardo Villas Boas, the chief of the military command. Party officials, like former foreign minister Celso Amorim, have repeatedly told the media that Bolsonaro "does not represent the military."

This appeal for military support against the far-right candidate has ominous implications in a country that suffered two decades of military dictatorship following the 1964 US-backed coup. Given their support for imperialist wars for regime change in the Middle East and their Egyptian political co-thinkers' backing for the Al-Sisi's coup in 2013, the

lining up of the Morenoite and Pabloite backers of the “anti-fascist front” with a section of the military is by no means excluded.

Brazilian workers must reject this treacherous “front” with contempt and draw the lessons of four decades of PT betrayals.