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Brazil

Oil Speaks Loudest: Environmental backsliding and the limits of Brazil's energy transition

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On 20 October, exactly three weeks before the beginning of COP30 in Belem, Brazil's environmental regulator, IBAMA, finally approved a licence for the state-controlled oil company, Petrobras, to drill an exploratory well off the coast of Amazonia, close to the mouth of the Amazon River. That same Monday, within hours of the announcement, drilling began. A couple of days later, Petrobras said it would need to sink three more wells in Block 59 to evaluate the exact extent of the reserves. Petrobras is hoping these deep-sea oil fields will prove to hold reserves similar in size to the estimated 11 billion barrels that Exxon-Mobil has begun to exploit further north off Guyana, in waters disputed with Venezuela. That's more than 30 times the amount of oil held in the Rosebank field off Shetland, which the UK government is about to rule on.

On 23 October, eight Brazilian NGOs sought a legal order to block the drilling. They pointed to the lack of any proper consultation with Indigenous peoples in the region, and the failure of any full evaluation of the environmental impact, both locally and globally. They suggested the move made a mockery of the Brazilian government's commitments for the coming COP30. But it seemed unlikely their injunction request would succeed. President Luis Inacio Lula da Silva, of the Workers Party (PT), regretted that "nobody is in a position to do without fossil fuels". He said the income from the Amazon oil would be used to combat poverty and pay for the transition away from fossil fuels.

Subverta, one of the currents in the PSOL that makes up the Brazilian section of the Fourth International, says the decision reflects a much more fundamental limitation in the government's approach to the environment.*[IVP]*

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