

# Bolsonaro inaugurated as head of Brazil's most right-wing government since dictatorship

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Jair Bolsonaro, the fascistic ex-army captain and federal legislator, was formally inaugurated as president of Brazil January 1 in a ceremony marked by a massive mobilization of security forces, the deliberate suppression of the media and extreme right-wing rhetoric.

Bolsonaro, wearing a bulletproof vest and surrounded by a heavy guard, delivered two public speeches on Tuesday. The first was his swearing-in before the Brazilian Congress, which was boycotted by the Workers Party (PT), which he defeated in last year's elections. It included words about his supposed "commitment to build a society with no discrimination nor divisions," and a call for a "national pact" to revive Brazil's crisis-ridden economy based upon free-market policies.

He called upon the Congress members to join him in the "mission" of "liberating" Brazil from "the game of corruption, criminality, economic irresponsibility and ideological submission."

He paid tribute to the police and vowed that the armed forces would "have the necessary conditions to complete their constitutional mission of defense of sovereignty, the national territory and the democratic institutions."

He inveighed against "gender ideology"—a buzz phrase of the religious right directed against any policy promoting gender equality along with abortion and LGBT rights—and vowed that schools would be transformed to prepare "children for the labor market and not for political militancy."

A second speech delivered in front of Palácio do Planalto, the official presidential residence, was, if anything, more reactionary. Reviving his campaign rhetoric before a crowd of flag-waving supporters, he declared that Brazilians were "breaking free from socialism" and "political correctness" and that his was a government that would "reestablish order in this country."

He concluded his speech shouting, "Brazil above all, God above all." Waving a Brazilian flag, he said that "This is our flag, it will never be red. It will only be red if it needs our blood to keep it green and yellow."

The most prominent foreign officials attending the inauguration were Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu,

Hungary's far-right Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo.

Netanyahu is the first Israeli prime minister to visit Brazil, and his presence was driven in large part by Bolsonaro's campaign pledge to ape US President Donald Trump by moving the Brazilian embassy to Jerusalem. There were also reports that Netanyahu was coming with unspecified promises of Israeli "security" assistance.

Bolsonaro had already spoken with Orbán in November and bonded with him based on their shared anticommunism and hostility to immigrants.

As for Pompeo, the US secretary of state and the Brazilian president held a closed-door meeting where collaboration on regime-change in Venezuela was reportedly the principal topic of discussion.

The inauguration was representative of what is unquestionably the most right-wing government to take office in Brazil since the end of the two-decade-long military dictatorship that came to power with the CIA-backed coup that overthrew President João Goulart in 1964.

After a long period in which the military assumed a low profile following its unpunished crimes of murder, disappearances, torture and extrajudicial detention under the dictatorship, Bolsonaro has brought the military back into government on a scale not seen since that era. Seven of the 22 new government ministers are active or retired military generals and officers.

Many of the senior officers brought into the government gained prominence as commanders of the Brazilian troops that formed the main elements of the UN occupation force deployed in Haiti under the former Workers Party governments. These include General Augusto Heleno, who will take over the Institutional Security Office (GSI), Bolsonaro's government secretary General Carlos Alberto dos Santos and General Ajax Porto Pinheiro, the last commander in Haiti, who will take over as the assistant to the chief justice of the Supreme Court, José Antônio Dias Toffoli, replacing yet another general, Fernando Azevedo e Silva, who has been named secretary of defense.

General Heleno, a graduate of WHINSEC, the successor

institution to the US Army's School of the Americas, is widely considered the most influential of the military chiefs in the new government, serving as a close political adviser to Bolsonaro.

Much as occurred at the outset of the Trump administration in the United States, commentators and political figures, including leading elements from previous Workers Party governments, have begun to suggest that the generals will serve as the “adults in the room” of the new Bolsonaro administration.

Such was the reaction of Celso Amorim, who served as Brazil's foreign minister under the now-jailed former PT President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, and defense minister under his impeached and ousted successor Dilma Rousseff. “I have many differences with the elected government, principally over foreign policy,” he told the Brazilian daily *Folha de SP*, “but, curiously, the most sensible and balanced statements that I have heard until now have come, in general, from the members of the military who make it up.”

The reaction of the PT and its parliamentary split-off the PSOL (Party of Socialism and Liberty) to Bolsonaro's assumption of power was one of utter prostration. They were unwilling and unable to organize any demonstrations against the inauguration.

Meanwhile, the CUT, the main trade union federation affiliated to the PT, has joined with other trade union federations in addressing an obsequious letter to the incoming president that they said was written to “respectfully present themselves to Your Excellency with the disposition of building a dialogue to the benefit of the workers and the Brazilian people.”

Prior to the letter, the president of the CUT, Vagner Freitas, gave an interview to the Spanish daily *El Pais*, apologizing for his statement last November declaring that because former PT president Lula had been excluded from the election due to his criminal conviction on corruption charges, “we do not recognize Mr. Bolsonaro as the president of the Republic.”

Declaring that “obviously there were votes of workers that elected Bolsonaro,” Freitas blamed these votes on social media—in particular, the use of WhatsApp—and workers seeing the ex-army captain as someone “outside the system” who capitalized on a “sentiment for change.” He made clear, nonetheless, that the CUT considered Bolsonaro the legitimate president of Brazil and would seek to negotiate with him.

Indeed, the former strongholds of the CUT and the PT in São Paulo's “ABC” industrial belt delivered majorities of 60 percent or more to Bolsonaro, a stunning repudiation of the Workers Party over its responsibility for anti-working-class policies and wholesale corruption.

Meanwhile, the various pseudo-left outfits in Brazil are demanding that the CUT lead a workers' struggle against Bolsonaro, despite its failure to mount any struggle against the previous government of Michel Temer, the right-wing vice-president chosen by the PT, who assumed the government after Rousseff's impeachment, and its collaboration in the attacks

on workers' rights carried out under the PT governments.

The Brazilian stock market saw a record rise on Wednesday in response to Bolsonaro's taking office and the first actions rolled out by the new government. Its economics minister, Paulo Guedes, a free market economist trained at the University of Chicago, indicated that a social security “reform”—based on raising the retirement age to the point where workers will die before they can collect benefits—privatizations and tax cuts for the corporations and the rich will be the “pillars of the new administration.”

The euphoria of the financial markets may be short-lived. On the eve of his inauguration, Bolsonaro and his incoming government were already engulfed in a series of scandals of the type that led millions of Brazilian voters to reject the PT and the existing political setup to vote for the supposed “outsider” ex-captain. At least six of his 22 ministers have been implicated in corruption, including his chief of staff, Onyx Lorenzoni—who has been accused of taking bribes from construction giant Odebrecht—and his economics minister Paulo Guedes, who reportedly organized the looting of pension funds.

Meanwhile, a state regulator has uncovered suspicious financial transactions flowing through the bank account of a driver employed by Bolsonaro's son, amounting to 1.2 million reais (\$305,033). The transactions include payments made to the president-elect's wife, Michelle Bolsonaro.

More significantly, on the eve of the inauguration, social conflicts continued to erupt in Brazil. Last Wednesday, a mass demonstration of teachers and municipal employees against pension cuts being voted on by the São Paulo City Council was met with tear gas, pepper spray and rubber bullets.

The inauguration of Bolsonaro opens up a new period of sharp dangers for the working class, but the imposition of a new far-right government dominated by the military will not be consummated without an explosion of social struggles throughout Latin America's largest country.

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