

# Officials, media call for school militarization, censorship after mass shooting in Brazilian school

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Brazil, one of the most unequal and violent countries in the world, was left stunned a week ago on Wednesday by the brutality of a school shooting in the city of Suzano, in the industrial belt surrounding São Paulo. Two former students of the Raul Brasil State School, one aged 17 and the other 25, opened fire during a class break, killing five students and two school officials and wounding 17 others, before the 17-year-old shot his older accomplice and killed himself as the police arrived.

It soon emerged that another murder in the city minutes earlier, of the 17-year-old's uncle, was the beginning of the rampage. This week, police announced the provisional detention of another 17-year-old youth, charged with helping to organize the massacre.

As the police and media investigation into the reasons for the massacre and the profiles of the shooters began, it immediately became clear that deep social alienation had been a major factor in their lives for a long time. Despite the age difference, the two had been friends from an early age and shared a considerable portion of their lives together playing video games at a local LAN gaming center, where workers told investigators they mostly played so-called shooting games, as do most of those who go there.

While the older shooter, Luiz Henrique de Castro, had graduated from the school, the younger one, Guilherme Tauci de Monteiro, had dropped out a year ago, telling his parents and grandparents, with whom he lived, that he couldn't bear the feeling of social awkwardness and exclusion. His family, itself in considerable social distress as a result of the mother being unemployed for two years and also suffering from severe drug addiction, was unable to help. The conditions affecting his family are widespread in the city, at the center of a growing "rust belt" in São Paulo's far east, in which no less than 25 percent of families are recipients of poverty relief benefits, and industry and trade are facing a slow recovery from a 43 percent collapse.

According to family members, despite the long build-up of Monteiro's distress, the death of his grandmother three months ago plunged him into what appeared to be severe depression.

Much evidence, including social media posts, has also shown that the shooters had grown increasingly close to the far-right milieu, including to the online defenders of unabashed police violence in Brazil and promoters of violent threats against public figures associated with the left, and, not least, those targeted by Brazil's fascistic President Jair Bolsonaro himself.

At some point, Monteiro started adopting American neo-Nazi symbols, including the skull balaclava that he wore when he invaded the Raul Brasil school, and which is worn by members of the neo-Nazi "Atomwaffen Division" in the US. An active line of investigation is being pursued into what extent the shooters had been involved with dark web "chans"—like those used by the fascist terrorist of Christchurch, where, in the wake of the massacre, monitors have detected not only messages of celebration, but also the emergence of messages being attributed to the shooters in Brazil.

In the official reactions from authorities and media, broader social issues remained the great unmentionable. For the know-nothings in the government and media, no word was warranted about the Brazilian social apartheid that is fueling civil-war levels of youth deaths in "drug wars," countless state-sponsored police murders and the locking-up of 700,000 people, who live in constant terror of being decapitated in another riot in the veritable dungeons that constitute the country's prison system.

While city and state authorities immediately issued perfunctory condolence statements. The fascistic president Jair Bolsonaro took six hours to post a statement on social media, predictably calling the massacre an act of "incomparable monstrosity and cowardice." The Supreme Court president issued a dismissive statement in which he absurdly claimed that "this kind of violence is not part of our culture."

Meanwhile, in Congress, politicians reduced the massacre to the questions of either gun control or the arming of teachers. Leaders and members of Congress from the Workers Party (PT) and Socialism and Liberty Party (PSOL), acting with the minds of petty state bureaucrats, issued mealy-mouthed statements, peppered with cheap psychoanalysis, about it being "necessary to end the culture of violence, which presents guns as a 'purveyor of power.'"

Much more significant, however, was the bankrupt and reactionary response of what passes for the "progressive" press, as expressed in *Folha de S. Paulo's* opinion pages, where the consensus was that reporting on the issue only encouraged future tragedies, and that attempting to reflect on wider underlying issues such as inequality, unemployment and the generally violent relations under capitalism was a distraction from the problems of "patriarchy" and "entitlement," as well as the "suffering of the

victims.”

Such opinions were expressed against the ominous backdrop of a statement by São Paulo’s Public Attorney’s office announcing that it is seeking to bring terrorism charges against anyone involved in the attack, unleashing the draconian 2016 anti-terror law approved by the PT. The measure would set a precedent for the witch-hunt of hundreds of thousands of people sharing, in one way or another, gun-related material the Attorney General’s office considers akin to that shared by the assailants.

Expressing the lurch to the right by the upper middle class, cultural critic Nelson de Sá quickly reacted to the tragedy with unmistakable “#MeToo” language, writing: “contrary to American journalism, we in Brazil still haven’t learned that the protagonists in this kind of story are the victims, not the assassins.” In other words, any attempt to understand what motivated two youth to kill others and then take their own lives is forbidden, and the public must accept that such tragedies just happen.

Another reactionary piece was written by the paper’s Ombudsman, who gained notoriety during the election for criticizing *Folha*’s editorial board for not classifying Bolsonaro as a far-right politician. Defending Sá’s line of reasoning, she related the Suzano tragedy with the Christchurch attack, asking rhetorically about the Australian fascist’s manifesto: “what is the point of reporting someone’s amateurish evaluation of the effect of race mixing on a nation’s development?” In other words, the Brazilian public must not be warned of the international fascist danger.

Another high-profile piece posted by *Folha* was a 2018 *New York Times* article by Frank Bruni that blames all such tragedies—as well as Bolsonaro’s election—on the internet, and concludes with a call for censorship: “I don’t know exactly how we square free speech and free expression—which are paramount—with a better policing of the internet, but I’m certain that we need to approach that challenge with more urgency than we have mustered so far. Democracy is at stake. So are lives.”

Such privileged layers, with nothing by contempt for the public in general and the working class in particular, are shifting ever further rightward. They are terrified that such supposedly incomprehensible tragedies are pushing broad layers of the population to see and react against *the whole* of capitalist irrationality, as shown by the outpouring of solidarity for the slain children.

Fifteen thousand people attended their collective funeral. As for the reaction of the parents, one of them told the press: “It never crossed my mind not to forgive the assailants. They are kids. They too are victims.” He added: “Dealing with them was first their family’s responsibility. But if the family can’t help, what is to be done?”

The army of petty-bourgeois identity politics pseudo-leftists are determined to suppress such questions. Their thoroughly reactionary response includes the assertion by *Vice News* that the attack was typical of someone “feeling wronged for not having what was promised to him [as a “man”]: a fancy job, high salary and sex with beautiful women.” Similarly, Marcelo Hailer in *Revista Fórum* stated that “toxic masculinity killed the Suzano students,” adding that “this masculinity promises a world of

conquest for heterosexual men.”

It never occurs to these misanthropes that far more than “a world of conquests” is missing for millions of youth—particularly in deindustrialized towns like Suzano. More and more, the logical conclusion of this pseudo-left interpretation of the tragedy coincides with that of the far right—the youth who carried out the shootings were “monsters.”

A break with such reactionary views and the pseudo-left organizations which promote them is ever more urgent, as the far-right is openly targeting youth in Brazil and internationally in anticipation of major class struggles, and the Bolsonaro government is seeking to rally a far-right base by constantly appealing for parents, and even students, to denounce “Marxist indoctrination” by teachers and professors.

This campaign is being closely coordinated with the international far right. This was shown in Bolsonaro’s US visit, which included meetings with both Steve Bannon and the Virginia-based fascist charlatan Olavo de Carvalho.

Supported by powerful corporate backers, right-wingers supporting the campaign have already pushed the PT and the pseudo-left out of two major student unions, in Rio Grande do Sul in the far south and in the capital Brasília, while Bolsonaro supporters have just finished their first “Conservative Students Congress,” hailing Brazil’s military dictatorship’s murderers and promising to escalate the witch hunt against socialism.

There is no doubt that such a fascist campaign had its role in the channeling of the two shooters’ social alienation into such extreme anti-social behavior.

The Suzano tragedy has exposed the dismissive attitude of the PT and its satellites towards broader issues, which has in itself facilitated the official red-baiting. Despite their claims to be an “anti-fascist” opposition to Bolsonaro, these organizations have never missed an opportunity to answer far-right rants and threats by Bolsonaro and his supporters by completely dissociating themselves from socialism.



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