

Emboldened by Trump, Brazil's Bolsonaro orders military to celebrate 1964 coup

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On Monday, presidential spokesman Gen. Otávio Barros announced to the press the unprecedented decision taken by Brazil's fascistic President Jair Bolsonaro to order military institutions to prepare "due celebrations" of the anniversary of the 1964 US-backed military coup that brought down the bourgeois-nationalist government of President João Goulart.

The coup inaugurated a blood-soaked regime that would last until 1985 and that would prove instrumental in the installation of three other genocidal military regimes in the following years, in Chile and Uruguay in 1973 and Argentina in 1976, that murdered, tortured and persecuted millions of South Americans.

Bolsonaro has insisted that the military regime was not a dictatorship and that its seizure of power in 1964 was not a coup. He has defended torture and insisted that the solution to Brazil's problems is to "do the job that the military regime didn't do: killing 30,000."

Bolsonaro's order is yet another milestone in the protracted and sharp turn to the right taken by the Brazilian political regime since the re-election of Workers Party (PT) President Dilma Rousseff in 2014. Although such celebrations have been held furtively in the country's military institutions, especially military schools and academies and retired officers' clubs, it is the first time an elected president orders such ceremonies and publicly defends the former dictatorship.

The return of such open celebrations again exposes the lies of all those in the former opposition to the dictatorship, first and foremost in the PT, that a stable bourgeois democracy could be built in Brazil if only there was respect for their treacherous agreements granting a blanket amnesty to the sadistic murderers and torturers of the regime.

Every president following the dictatorship abided by this amnesty, despite public outcry. This included former president Fernando Henrique Cardoso, an exile stripped of his university tenure by the regime, Lula, jailed as leader of mass anti-dictatorship strikes and Dilma Rousseff, who succeeded Lula, a former urban guerrilla fighter, imprisoned and tortured by the regime.

The so-called amnesty law was defended by the PT until its last moments in power. Even when it allowed investigations by a belated "truth committee" into the regime's crimes in 2011,

the PT effectively blocked the work of this panel, publicly declaring it was against the "persecution" of military criminals—the same language used at the end of the regime to promote the "amnesty." The commission was wound up in 2014 without a single indictment.

Monday's presidential decree, certainly long in preparation, was nevertheless given an extraordinary impulse by the reaction of both the press and the PT opposition to Bolsonaro's visits to the US and Chile. The tour provided another opportunity for Bolsonaro's supposed political opponents to incite military elements within the government against the president—not as members of an elected government, but as tried and trusted state agents, the only legitimate "moderating" political force in the country. Against such a backdrop, Bolsonaro has sought to reinforce his own fascist appeal, building up his support among wider layers of far-right officers in the military and, just as importantly, in the murderous police forces across Brazil.

Bolsonaro's pro-imperialist tour was met with a fierce factional attack led by the country's oldest daily, *O Estado de S. Paulo*, a traditional mouthpiece for the military, which published no less than five editorials, during and after both trips. It set the tone for the other three major papers, *Folha de S. Paulo*, *Valor Econômico* and *O Globo*, denouncing Bolsonaro's alignment with Trump as counter to Brazilian economic interests. This culminated with a piece in the March 21 edition of *O Estado*, headlined "Diplomatic victory, yes, but for Trump." The editorial charged that the trip was useless at best, and that Bolsonaro had "approached a president, not a country," given that "even in the Republican Party, Trump's values face resistance." It went on to cite approvingly the fact that "China has resisted US demands."

Highlighting the sharp turn towards US imperialism sponsored by Bolsonaro and his military and corporate backers, the tour had plenty of ominous references to the crimes committed by US imperialism and its "nationalist" military collaborators in Latin America. This included Bolsonaro's unannounced visit to the headquarters of the CIA, which played a key role in orchestrating the 1964 coup, and a radio commentary by Bolsonaro's chief-of-staff, Onyx Lorenzoni, one day before the Chile visit, in which he declared that

Pinochet's "bloodbath was necessary."

Significantly, after his visit to Washington, Bolsonaro went to Chile to participate in the founding of a new pro-imperialist union of South American nations, the PROSUL, which was created to bury the initiative of the former "pink tide" governments in founding the now-defunct UNASUL in 2008. As a lifelong apologist for the Pinochet regime, he was met with popular protests, but embraced by the right-wing government of President Sebastian Piñera. Bolsonaro's far-right politics are an essential component of the new PROSUL.

The celebration and vindication of torture and murder were the least of *Estado de S. Paulo's* concerns, as its editorial on the Chile trip demonstrated. "Everybody knows Bolsonaro's position on these issues," an editorial titled "Looking for a President" said, "but as Brazil's representative, he should keep these opinions on dictators and dictatorships in neighboring nations to himself, as they naturally cause discomfort." It later concluded: "Worried about the petty concerns of his base, Mr. Jair Bolsonaro appears to have given up a government for all."

Coming from a paper that is up to its neck in the red-baiting and coup-mongering against the Venezuelan government, which was supportive of the Brazilian dictatorship, which regularly features military commanders in its opinion pages and which has directed its fire at Bolsonaro for sidelining the career generals in his government in favor of his family circle, these lines were a shot across the bow. The factional warfare that has gripped the Brazilian bourgeoisie since the beginning of Rousseff's second term in 2015 is escalating.

Not coincidentally, Bolsonaro's vice president, Gen. Hamilton Mourão, met with 600 businessmen at a dinner last Tuesday, in what was obscenely dubbed the "trillion reais dinner"—a reference to the total worth of the participants, US\$250 billion. Next week, Mourão himself will travel to the US and meet businessmen at Harvard's "Brazil Conference."

The conflicts unfolding around Bolsonaro's alignment with Washington are profound. They have dominated Brazilian political life since the end of the commodity boom and the launching of the US "pivot to Latin America." These developments narrowed the possibilities of relative independence from US imperialism that existed during the "pink tide," and curtailed the capacity to use export profits to finance minimum poverty relief programs. These factors made Brazil more susceptible to the gravitational pull of US imperialism over Latin America, which, acting with the strength of a natural law, draws an economically decelerating Brazil closer into its orbit.

A new international alignment thus became a central issue for the ruling class in the last elections, along with a massive restructuring of class relations, embodied in the so-called "pension reform." The pro-US shift was based on calculations above all regarding Brazilian interests in the face of "great power conflicts"—i.e., between the US and China and Russia—which have become the central focus of US foreign

policy.

However, both immediate and long-term problems highlighted by the US visit are related to the decline of US imperialism and the trade war imposed on China by Washington, which may cut deeply into Brazilian exports to and investments from China without any tangible compensation from the US. *Valor Econômico's* Assis Moreira clearly outlined the most immediate worries: if the US is able to impose the end of its trade deficit with China, "US exports would jump from \$600 billion in 2024 compared to \$155 billion in 2018. This would cut into Brazilian exports by 10 to 20 percent."

With rising rivalries across the globe and the gangster tactics of Trump, no one should take his promise to support Brazil's membership in the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) as good coin, or, even if he kept the promise, that it would offer any way out of Brazil's protracted economic slump.

Such distrust animates Bolsonaro's bourgeois opponents. Moreover, factions of the ruling class are worried that the openly pro-US alignment and its accompanying fascistic rhetoric may stir popular opposition and derail the vote on the "pension reform." Such calculations were exposed in a *Financial Times* article of March 8, titled "Will Bolsonaro's 'cultural wars' derail the reforms?" What the *Financial Times* euphemistically calls "cultural wars" are Bolsonaro's litany of "god, family and nation" which have provoked widespread revulsion in Brazil and are exposing before broad layers of the population the rot of his government and the political system which produced it.

To the extent that the military criticizes what has been dismissively dubbed the "ideological wing" of the government that dominated during the US trip, it is not out of any sympathy for democracy or independence from imperialism, but rather an awareness of the extremely limited support these ideas enjoy within the population.

To oppose the "crazy ideologues" with calls for increased powers to the "reasonable" military will not change the sharp dangers confronting the working class one iota. Such a campaign is a treacherous cover-up of the deep crisis that produced Bolsonaro, and must be relentlessly denounced.

The author also recommends:

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