

# Brazil's minister of culture fired after fascist speech plagiarizing Joseph Goebbels

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Brazil's special secretary of culture, Roberto Alvim, was removed from his post on January 17 amid public furor over a video he posted the previous day on his official Twitter account in which he delivered a fascist speech on art that directly plagiarized the words of Joseph Goebbels, the propaganda minister of Hitler's Third Reich.

Alvim delivered his speech flanked by a Brazilian flag and a cross and with a Wagner opera that was reportedly Hitler's favorite playing in the background. He used it to announce a National Arts Award, a government propaganda initiative to encourage the production of a counter-revolutionary art, based on nationalism and religious values.

Alvim said: "Brazilian art in the next decade will be heroic and will be national. It will be endowed with great capacity for emotional involvement and will be equally imperative, since it is deeply linked to the urgent aspirations of our people, or else it will be nothing."

The phrase is a literal adaptation of Goebbels, who said: "German art of the next decade will be heroic, will be ferociously romantic, will be objective and free of sentimentalism, will be national with great pathos and equally imperative and binding, or else it will be nothing."

After the video came under intense fire, Alvim made the improbable claim that the similarity between the speeches was mere coincidence. However, he resolutely defended the conceptions of "national art" it expressed, which are entirely in sync with the those of Goebbels: "The origin is spurious, but the ideas contained in the sentence are absolutely perfect".

Although he held Alvim and his fascist ideas about art in high esteem, President Jair Bolsonaro was forced to dismiss the secretary, claiming he had made an "unfortunate pronouncement." The speech had exposed far too openly the type of fascist ideology that permeates Bolsonaro's administration. Among those calling most vocally for the minister's ouster was Rodrigo Maia, the president of the Chamber of Deputies and leader of the extreme right-wing Democratic party, which is the successor to ARENA, the political party created by the military dictatorship that ruled the country from 1964 to 1985.

Also weighing on Bolsonaro's decision was an appeal from Israel's ambassador to Brazil, Yossi Shelley, a member of the right-wing Likud party, who called the Brazilian president after the release of the speech, undoubtedly concerned that Alvim's speech provided further proof of the fascist and anti-Semitic character of

the regimes that constitute some of Israel's closest allies. Bolsonaro has aped the extreme pro-Israeli policies of the Trump administration, both to further his government's attempt to bring Brazil into alignment with Washington's geostrategic orientation and—as with the case of Trump himself—to appeal to right-wing evangelical Christian political forces that are pro-Zionist. The incident reprises the controversy last April when Bolsonaro declared that it was possible to "forgive" the crimes of the Holocaust, only to subsequently claim he did not mean the remark to be taken in "historic context."

In an attempt to counteract the uproar over the Alvim speech, the president's son, Eduardo Bolsonaro, launched a Twitter campaign with the hashtag #criminalizacommunismo. The slogan accompanies the introduction of a bill in the Brazilian congress to "criminalize the advocacy of communism." The campaign was immediately taken up by government officials such as Minister of Education Abraham Weintraub. Eduardo Bolsonaro stated: "Brazil correctly abhors Nazism. ... But much more murderous was and is communism/socialism that lives changing its name and reinventing itself, but continues killing wherever it goes."

Anti-communism was also the hallmark of a fascist speech delivered by Bolsonaro on the same day that the video with the Goebbels quote was released. In a ceremony to replace the command of Operation Reception—a humanitarian cover for Brazil's military operations on its border with Venezuela—the president threatened to dissolve democracy in response to a dangerous growth of socialism in Latin America: "Don't give this left a chance! They shouldn't be treated like normal people. ... We can't let our children get into the situation of this little boy here beside me [a Venezuelan], fleeing the country because, by using the weapons of democracy, these corrupt bandits have returned to power."

Despite using the speech to denounce his political rivals in the Workers Party (PT), the major threat singled out by Bolsonaro was the uprising of the working class in Chile, with the massive protests against social inequality at the end of 2019. He warned that the country was "heading for chaos, heading for socialism." Previously, he had described the Chilean protests as terrorist actions, warning that if similar mass upheavals were to break out in Brazil they should be answered with the intervention of the army. His son threatened to respond to such a situation with the resurrection of AI-5 (Institutional Act No. 5), the decree that justified the murder, torture and repression carried out under the

US-backed military dictatorship.

Roberto Alvim's speech was merely the expression in cultural policy of this fascistic crusade against socialism that constitutes the political axis of the Bolsonaro government. Alvim, with his ideology informed by the historical examples of fascism, was very well received and quickly rose to the top of the government. Just hours before Alvim posted the reviled video, Bolsonaro, clearly conscious of and delighted by what was about to be released, praised Alvim, saying: "Now we have a real Secretary of Culture. That meets the interests of the majority of the Brazilian population, a conservative and Christian population."

The bourgeois media has attempted to present Alvim as an aberration, with major dailies making the claim that had he made the same speech in Germany, he would have been arrested. This of course ignores the fact that a neo-Nazi party, the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD), is presently the third largest party in the federal parliament, fascist violence is on the rise, and right-wing academics are attempting to revise history in order to minimize the crimes of Hitler. The fundamental purpose, however, is to deny the fact that Alvim, like Bolsonaro himself, is part of a universal process of the capitalist ruling class in every country responding to their deepening crisis and the growth of the class struggle by turning to authoritarian forms of rule and fascism.

Alvim's political evolution, until he became the grotesque figure plagiarizing Goebbels' gestures and words, is instructive. Before his career in government, Alvim was a prominent theater director at the head of the Club Noir company. Far from a proponent of nationalist or far-right artistic conceptions, he had been awarded for his adaptations of modern and international authors such as Samuel Beckett, Richard Maxwell and Arne Lygre. A professed Catholic, much of his work was influenced by religious symbolism.

One of his last shows, in 2016, was a version of the novel "Leite Derramado," a historical critique of Brazil's ruling elite, written by Chico Buarque, one of Brazil's most renowned singer-songwriters and composer, who was censored and exiled by the military dictatorship. The piece was created in partnership with a well-known philosopher of the pseudo-left, Vladimir Safatle, who was listed as a candidate for the government of São Paulo by the Socialism and Freedom Party (PSOL) and is aligned with the MES, a Morenoite tendency within PSOL.

Alvim, whose theater was facing bankruptcy, made a sudden political turn to the right, supporting Bolsonaro in his 2018 presidential campaign. He gained prominence by blaming his theater's subsequent failure on leftist "persecution" and by accusing leftists of employing political criteria for selecting artists for government cultural grants. When tapped to head the National Art Foundation in June 2019, Alvim called on artists "to align themselves with conservative values in the field of art and theater," calling upon them to create a "cultural war machine."

Alvim has attributed his radical transformation to a divine calling. In reality, like the rise of the Bolsonaro regime itself, it reflects the deep social and economic crisis in Brazil and, in his case, the pressures building up upon layers of the petty bourgeoisie linked to the pseudo-left. The most common reaction is political pessimism and blaming the working class for failing to support the

Workers Party, which itself paved the way for Bolsonaro's rise through its austerity measures, attacks on workers' rights, and endemic corruption. That such moods can find political expression in the swing to the right and even to fascism by elements such as Alvim serves as a serious warning.

While Alvim represents a small minority, he is not entirely alone. Another prominent case is that of Josias Teófilo, a filmmaker who was previously associated with Kleber Mendonça, among Brazil's most prominent directors. Breaking with Mendonça, he proceeded to make a film glorifying the "philosophy" of the far-right charlatan and associate of Steve Bannon, Olavo de Carvalho.

There is a certain logic as well in Alvim's apparent leap from collaborating with the pseudo-left philosopher Safatle to embracing the fascistic ideology of Carvalho. Both were contributors to the magazine *Cult*, where Safatle has promoted the ideas of Lacan and Adorno and Carvalho has advanced his own brand of irrationalism.

While the Workers Party has cultivated a base among more privileged sections of the Brazilian middle class, including the artistic milieu, neither it nor its pseudo-left satellites have any policy or perspective to counter the growth of right-wing moods and ideologies.

The pseudo-left has dedicated itself to the "free Lula" campaign to keep former PT President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva out of jail on corruption charges, while promoting the program of a "left-wing front," centered on the Workers Party, for the next elections.

For its part, unable today to mount a credible appeal to the workers, Lula and the PT are seeking support against Bolsonaro among the most reactionary forces in the country: the army, agribusiness, large national companies and evangelicals.

The objective crisis, however, is creating the conditions for the Brazilian workers to join the wave of struggles that is emerging in the neighboring countries of Latin America and on every continent. This will inevitably bring them into conflict with not only Bolsonaro and his fascistic government, but also the right-wing capitalist policies of the PT. The decisive question is the forging of a revolutionary and internationalist leadership in the working class. This means building a Brazilian section of the International Committee of the Fourth International.



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