Clash between Bolsonaro and Congress deepens crisis of capitalist rule in Brazil

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A dispute between Brazil's Congress and the country's fascistic President Jair Bolsonaro over who will control the 2020 budget has exacerbated internal divisions within the Brazilian bourgeoisie. The attempt by congressmen to expand the so-called tax budget—instituted in 2015 and which the president has no power to change—was answered by the top echelons of the Bolsonaro government with calls to disempower Congress by means of popular pressure.

This position was expressed by Gen. Augusto Heleno, one of Bolsonaro's right-hand men and head of the Institutional Security Office. Transmitted live by the government, allegedly by "accident," Heleno was recorded saying: "We cannot accept these guys [Congress] blackmailing us. Fuck them." The general told Bolsonaro that he could not "be intimidated" and that he should show the population that he was being pressured.

In response to Heleno's speech, street demonstrations that had been called for March 15 in support of Bolsonaro have shifted their focus to a protest against Congress. Material promoting the demonstrations has featured pictures of the generals brought into Bolsonaro's cabinet along with the slogan, "The generals are waiting for the orders of the people." Legislators directly linked to Bolsonaro have campaigned for the demonstrations, with Congresswoman Carla Zambelli, one of the founders of Bolsonaro's new fascist Alliance for Brazil party, at their head.

This campaign generated significant public controversy after a journalist for the daily *Estado de São Paulo* reported that Bolsonaro had personally shared a video calling for the demonstrations on WhatsApp. This exposure provoked widespread criticism within Brazil's political establishment, including from congressional leaders, the Supreme Court, the major newspapers and former presidents like Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva and Fernando Henrique Cardoso; all of them charging that Bolsonaro's action constituted a breach of democratic norms.

The Workers Party (PT), supported by the PSOL (Party of Socialism and Liberty) and other organizations of the pseudo-left, responded by turning a series of already scheduled protests into demonstrations against Bolsonaro's authoritarianism. The leadership of the PT, however, rejected any possibility of impeaching the president. In an interview with the Swiss newspaper *Le Temps*, Lula, the former Workers Party president, reiterated his position that "we have to wait four years ... We cannot think that we can overthrow a president because we don't like him."

Folha de São Paulo reported that the PT has concluded that there are no conditions for impeachment because Bolsonaro still enjoys substantial support from the markets and big business, an evaluation that speaks volumes about the bourgeois character of the so-called Workers Party.

The PT's cowardice is further exposed by positions taken by leading right-wing officials. The governor of Rio de Janeiro, Wilson Witzel of the Christian Social Party (PSC), who was elected by linking his campaign to that of Bolsonaro, said "the legal answer to this [the broadcasting of the video by Bolsonaro] is impeachment." Witzel's ally, João Doria, São Paulo governor and a member of the right-wing Brazilian Social Democratic Party (PSDB), called Bolsonaro's action "worrisome" and spoke out against an "escalation of authoritarianism."

Witzel and Doria, who head an alliance of 20 governors who have criticized the president's actions in a letter, have cast themselves as leaders of a bourgeois opposition to Bolsonaro. The dispute between Brasilia and the state governments has its origins in the profound contradictions of Brazilian society. Recent shocks have revolved around rising fuel prices, which threaten to unleash a new truckers' strike with broad support from the population. Trying to shift the burden of the crisis onto the states, Bolsonaro has publicly challenged the governors to end taxes on the circulation of goods, which fund state budgets.

Conflicts manifested themselves again with the threat of widespread riots by state Military Police spreading all over the country, following the example of the strike that began in the northeastern state of Ceará, which ended on Sunday. Since many governors based their electoral campaigns on support for the police and the military, as was markedly the case with Witzel and Doria, and since the police feel they enjoy political backing from Bolsonaro, they are demanding substantial salary increases.

Add to this the fact that the general policy is to apply strong recessionary measures directly attacking the living conditions of the working class and the situation becomes critical. On Tuesday, Doria's government in São Paulo approved a pension reform that attacks the retirement benefits of more than 500,000 state employees. The vote on the measure was made possible only through the brutal repression of a large teachers demonstration, with Military Police shock troops occupying the Legislative Assembly and leaving a number of workers injured. Dependence upon this repressive apparatus makes clear the reasons for Doria's concern over a rebellion of his own state's Military Police, to

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whom he has offered a much lower increase than that demanded by the rioting police in Ceará.

Despite having launched a "Guarantee of Law and Order (GLO)" and sending Army troops into Ceará, the Bolsonaro government still has a political base within the Military Police. It has repeatedly stressed that the responsibility for resolving the police mutiny rested with Ceará's PT state governor, Camilo Santana. Bolsonaro threatened to cut short the operation, saying, "The GLO is not to last forever serving one or more governors."

The federal intervention was used by Bolsonaro as a means to promote his proposed legislation granting federal troops engaged in domestic repression immunity from criminal prosecution, giving them an effective license to kill with impunity. Its practical effect, however, failed to meet the expectations of the state government, which expected troops to break up the strike by surrounding the mutinying barracks. Justice and Public Security Minister Sergio Moro responded that "the National Public Security Force and the Armed Forces, through the GLO, aim to replace the police and not confront them," calling the rioting police "dedicated professionals." This statement was celebrated by leaders of the strike.

The Bolsonaro government's support for the police rebellion became even more explicit with the end of the strike. The next day, the son of the president and right-wing congressman Eduardo Bolsonaro, declared solidarity with the Military Police who rebelled. "We are here to represent you police officers; you are not alone," he said. Even more remarkable was the performance of the commander of the militarized National Public Security Force, Col. Aginaldo de Oliveira, who personally attended a closing assembly of the strike, where he declared: "It is very courageous to do what you are doing ... You have moved an entire commission of the state of Ceará and the Brazilian federal government. ... Believe me, you are giants, you are monsters, you are brave, you have demonstrated this throughout these 10, 11, 12 days here inside this [occupied] barracks in search of class improvements, which you will achieve."

The political weight of this statement is even more striking as Col. Oliveira was married last month to Congresswoman Carla Zambelli, the champion of the March 15 demonstrations. To complete the picture, the best man at the wedding was Minister Sérgio Moro himself.

The Bolsonaro government is carrying out a definite break with bourgeois democratic forms of rule. This process can only be understood as part of an international political development. The turn to authoritarianism by the ruling class—manifested in the rise to power of figures like Bolsonaro in Brazil, Donald Trump in the US and Narendra Modi in India—is symptomatic of a profound crisis of the entire capitalist system.

However, the bourgeois institutions that the PT is vigorously defending in the counter-demonstrations that it has called this month offer no protection for the working class against capitalist reaction. On the contrary, it was under these institutions that the fascist danger was nurtured and within which it today shows its terrible face.

The freedom to employ the army against the population in the streets, which Bolsonaro is determined to consolidate, was prepared by PT governments that intervened with the armed forces to invade the *favela* slum neighborhoods and repress protests. It was also under the PT that Brazil's Terrorism Law was enacted, profoundly threatening any manifestation of social opposition. Today, Congress is seeking to extend this law as much as possible. Bolsonaro did not fall like a lightning bolt from a blue sky; he grew freely within the Brazilian state, and in political alliance with the PT over years.

The main function of the campaign of the PT and its pseudo-left satellites in defense of bourgeois democracy and its institutions is to politically disarm the working class. This task is headed, together with the PT, by the parties and organizations of the pseudo-left. Probably none of them has exposed their ideas as nakedly as the Morenites of the Resistance/PSOL. On their website EsquerdaOnline they published a call for participation in the anti-Bolsonaro protests that summarizes their deeply reactionary politics:

"The House of Representatives, the Federal Senate, the Supreme Court, the Attorney General's Office, political parties, political leaders, the Brazilian Bar Association, the Brazilian Press Association, the Brazilian Society for the Progress of Science, among other entities, have a duty to take concrete action against the plan set in motion to undermine the democratic regime. All democrats must be on the front line against the attacks on democratic rights and freedoms, building broad and unitary actions."

This program, which is aimed at suppressing the struggles of the working class and subordinating them to the right-wing bourgeois parties and even the direct instruments of capitalist state repression, reflects the politics and interests of an increasingly desperate layer of Brazil's privileged upper-middle class, which opposes and fears the growth of the class struggle.

Brazilian workers should reject such calls for "unity" with the capitalist state with the contempt that they deserve. The only answer to the threat of fascism and dictatorship lies in the independent struggle of the working class based upon the program of international socialist revolution. This makes all the more urgent the building of a new revolutionary leadership in Brazil as a section of the International Committee of the Fourth International.

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