

Brazilian justice minister resigns, charging Bolsonaro with interference in the Federal Police

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The government of Brazil's fascistic President Jair Bolsonaro, already reeling under the combined impact of the uncontrolled spread of the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on the country's economy, has been further destabilized by the resignation of Justice Minister Sérgio Moro and his denunciation of Bolsonaro for political interference in ongoing investigations.

Moro's resignation at the end of last week followed Bolsonaro's firing of the head of the Brazilian Federal Police, Maurício Valeixo. The Brazilian National Press initially published in the country's Federal Register that Valeixo had resigned and that both Bolsonaro and Moro had accepted his resignation. Hours later, however, Moro called a press conference to deny that Valeixo had resigned and announce that he would himself resign in protest over Bolsonaro's action.

Moro charged that Bolsonaro's motive for firing Valeixo's was a desire to interfere in the investigations. He bluntly declared: "The president told me he wanted [as head of the police] someone of his personal circle, whom he might call and collect information. It is not the role of the Federal Police to relay this kind of information."

As grave as they are, the charges leveled by Moro against Bolsonaro pale in comparison to the multiple investigations being conducted by several Brazilian agencies against the president and his sons, including possible involvement in the horrific death squad murder of Rio de Janeiro's Socialism and Liberty Party (PSOL) city councilor, Marielle Franco, in 2018.

Hours after Moro's resignation, the *Intercept Brasil* posted a report showing that the Rio de Janeiro attorney general's office, in collaboration with the Federal Police, had evidence directly connecting Senator Fávio Bolsonaro, the president's eldest son, with the suspected hitmen who killed Franco, ample reason for the Brazilian president to want access to and direct control over ongoing investigations.

As the convoluted case has developed, it became known that the chief suspect in the murder, Ronnie Lessa, was Bolsonaro's neighbor in a Rio gated community, and is believed to be part of the so-called Crime Office gang, whose suspected leader Adriano da Nóbrega had relatives working as aides to Flávio

when he was a member of Rio's state parliament.

The Crime Office gang is one of Rio's *militias*, gangs composed mainly of active duty and retired police officers which control large swathes of Rio de Janeiro, collecting informal taxes and monopolizing access to gas, electricity and the internet, as well as drugs and gambling.

The militias are direct successors to the death squads that murdered political opponents of the 1964–1985 military dictatorship. They evolved during the 1980s and 1990s promising "security" against drug dealers and petty criminals. The Bolsonaro family, heavily involved with the repressive forces and unapologetic admirers of the most vicious acts of the dictatorship, have regularly and publicly praised militia members.

Last November, Brazil's largest media group, the Globo conglomerate, directly charged Bolsonaro with involvement in Franco's execution, claiming a leaked police report proved the hitman Lessa had been in touch with Bolsonaro hours before the murder. The supposed evidence was disputed by officials and the issue buried from public attention until Nóbrega, Lessa's alleged crime boss, was murdered by the police at a hideout in the state of Bahia.

The murder of Franco was one of the main themes addressed by Bolsonaro as he lashed out against Moro in a press conference called after his resignation. Bolsonaro claimed the Federal Police were doing less to investigate the attempt on his own life on the campaign trail in 2018—which Bolsonaro barely survived—than the murder of Franco. In fact, the Franco case is being investigated by the police in Rio and attempts to federalize the probe have been resisted by her family in order to avoid Moro's and Bolsonaro's interference.

Bolsonaro's assailant, Adélio Bispo de Oliveira, was declared mentally incompetent, and the case was closed in 2019. Bolsonaro claimed Moro was neglecting the issue and it was legitimate that he replaced the Federal Police head over that case. He also charged Moro with being insufficiently committed to his far-right pro-gun, anti-abortion and anti-LGBT agendas.

Moro's resignation further fueled the frenzied political

atmosphere that has dominated Brazil for almost a year. There is increasing speculation that Bolsonaro could face impeachment or be forced to resign.

Moro's resignation comes barely two weeks after Bolsonaro sacked his health minister, Luiz Henrique Mandetta, for opposing his criminal neglect of the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic in the country and the president's attempts to sabotage state governors' imposition of quarantines to slow it down. Bolsonaro has for over a month denied states any financial help in an attempt to force them to end their economic shutdowns. The government has likewise delayed the distribution of medical equipment as the number of confirmed coronavirus cases has reached 65,000 and the number of deaths nearly 5,000. Both numbers are known to be gross underestimations of the virus's real toll as images circulate worldwide of corpses piling up in hospitals and mass graves being dug in Brazil's largest cities.

The defection of Moro also comes less than a week after Bolsonaro took part in a fascist demonstration in front of the army headquarters calling for a military intervention and the shutdown of Congress, the Supreme Court and the banning of the opposition, all of which organizers claimed were sabotaging Bolsonaro's rule by opposing his back-to-work orders.

The anxiety within the ruling class over Moro's departure was expressed by a 6 percent plunge in the market and a race to the dollar that cut the exchange rate of the Brazilian real by 4 percent.

Moro leaked WhatsApp messages to *Globo* in which Bolsonaro sent him a link to a press report headlined "Federal Police goes after 10 to 12 Bolsonaro loyalists in the House," followed by his insistence that this was "one more reason to fire" Valeixo.

The morning after the resignation, the major Brazilian newspapers were unanimous in siding with Moro. Their attitude was summed up by the editorial of the country's most widely read paper, *Folha de S. Paulo*, which declared that as a result of Moro's resignation it had become "unavoidable that the concerned authorities open investigations into charges of civil crimes and impeachable offenses leveled against Jair Bolsonaro."

The effect of Moro's resignation is further amplified by his popularity among Bolsonaro's supporters and his reputation within ruling circles—and also internationally—as a supposed crusader against corruption, lending credibility to Bolsonaro in the face of multiple scandals.

Before being appointed as Bolsonaro's Justice Minister—and, until his resignation, widely believed to be the president's likely first appointment to the Supreme Court—Moro acted for four years as the leading judge in the so-called Car Wash (Lava Jato) operation, which uncovered a massive bribes and kickbacks scandal centered at the state-run oil giant Petrobras and overseen by the Workers Party (PT) toward the end of its 13-year rule.

While the scandal implicated virtually the entire political establishment, combined with a deep economic crisis resulting in a 7 percent GDP drop in 2015–2016 along with brutal austerity measures imposed by then-president Dilma Rousseff, it provoked widespread revulsion among the PT's working-class base. The party's right-wing opposition was able to exploit this popular hostility to remove the PT from power on trumped-up charges of budget manipulation.

Moro took active part in the right-wing exploitation of the crisis by the ruling class, mostly through the pursuit of a corruption case against former PT President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, popularly known as Lula, Bolsonaro's main adversary in the 2018 elections and the leading candidate in the polls. While the massive rejection of the PT in traditional left-leaning regions such as Rio de Janeiro, Rio Grande do Sul and the working class suburbs of São Paulo made a PT victory far from certain, Moro politically intervened against the party on several occasions, and later was exposed in leaked phone messages as having improperly coached the prosecution against Lula before sentencing him on corruption charges and knocking him out of the election.

Bolsonaro took former PT strongholds by wide margins after running his campaign as a virtual referendum against the political system and the party that had controlled the government for more than a dozen years. During his campaign he lionized the former judge. He sought to use his connection to the supposedly incorruptible Moro as political insurance against fears within the ruling elite that an exposure of the fascist former army captain's criminal ties, forged during three decades as a backbencher in Congress—and former member of the PT's legislative coalition—would plunge the country back into political crisis.

Whatever the real reasons for Moro's treating the dismissal of the head of the Federal Police as a red line and publicly exposing Bolsonaro—after a year of supporting the president's fascist policies—his resignation will deepen an insoluble crisis of bourgeois rule in Brazil. While the ruling elite turns toward the military and increasingly authoritarian forms of rule, growing popular unrest over the economic crisis and the criminal response of the government to the COVID-19 pandemic is creating the conditions for an eruption of class struggle by the Brazilian working class.



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