

Brazil surpasses 350,000 cases as politicians promote rapid reopening of economy

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On Monday, for the first time, Brazil announced a larger number of deaths from COVID-19 in a single day than the United States. On Sunday, Latin America's largest country recorded 703 deaths, while the US registered 617. The confirmed death toll in Brazil has already surpassed 23,000.

The country currently has the second-largest number of confirmed coronavirus cases in the world, 367,906 in total. It trails the United States, which has 1,697,182 cases, and is just ahead of Russia with 353,427 cases.

Brazil's testing rate, however, is significantly lower than that of both these countries, with only 3,461 tests per million inhabitants, compared to 44,587 tests per million inhabitants in the United States and 61,300 tests per million in Russia.

An estimate based on parameters established by the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine indicates that only one in 20 cases of COVID-19 is being reported in Brazil. This would translate into an actual number of cases exceeding 7 million.

As a consequence of the uncontrolled spread of the virus, the country's precarious health care system is collapsing in every region.

The state of São Paulo is the center of the disease, with 83,625 cases and 6,220 deaths. The city of São Paulo already has more than 90 percent of its ICU beds occupied, despite the hundreds of new beds opened in field hospitals. Thirteen hospitals in the metropolitan region of São Paulo are already full and the disease is spreading more rapidly (up to four times faster) through the state's countryside.

In second place is the state of Rio de Janeiro, with 37,912 cases and 3,993 confirmed deaths. Like São Paulo, occupation of the ICU beds has also reached 90 percent, and there are more than 200 patients waiting for intensive care. There are also indications of high under-reporting of deaths in the state, suggesting twice the number recorded by the government.

Nevertheless, the right-wing governors of these states—São Paulo's João Doria of the Brazilian Social Democratic Party (PSDB) and Rio de Janeiro's Wilson Witzel of the Christian Social Party (PSC)—are promoting a general resumption of

economic activities.

Doria plans to reopen by June 1, but stresses that 74 percent of the economy is already open and only 26 percent remains closed. Last week, he already met with retail associations to discuss their return.

Witzel also presented a program to resume economic activities last week. He determined that once the ICU bed occupancy rate drops to between 90 and 70 percent, the reopening of commerce and the return of spectator sports, with up to 50 percent stadium capacity, among other things, will be allowed.

On Monday, commerce was reopened in Duque de Caxias, the second city most affected by the coronavirus in Rio de Janeiro, bringing crowds to the streets and forming lines in front of stores. The justification presented by the government was totally absurd—once new hospital beds have been created, the health system can accommodate more sick people and, without tax revenues, there will be no money to pay doctors.

The same trajectory, demanded by the capitalist class as a whole, is spreading throughout each state in the country.

Last week, the reopening of businesses was announced by the governors of the Northeastern states who define themselves as left-wing: Flávio Dino, of the Communist Party of Brazil (PCdoB), governor of Maranhão, and Camilo Santana, of the Workers Party (PT), governor of Ceará. The state of Ceará is one of the most affected by the coronavirus in the country, with 36,000 cases and 2,400 deaths, more than half of them in the capital, Fortaleza.

On Monday, the lockdown of the state of Pará was suspended. It lasted for about two weeks and had low effectiveness, reaching a peak of just over 50 percent of social isolation. The neighboring state of Amazonas, which has seen the greatest calamities associated with the coronavirus and registered more than 1,000 new infections last Sunday alone, plans to reopen its businesses on June 1.

Among the most criminal actions of the Brazilian bourgeoisie is the resumption of commercial activity in Belo Horizonte, the capital of Minas Gerais. It was directly

promoted by the president of the Federation of Industries of Minas Gerais (FIEMG), Flávio Roscoe, who said in an interview last week, “There is no point in the functioning of industry if commerce is stopped.”

He continued, “Activities, such as street commerce and stores with a small flow of people, do not offer real risk. If hand sanitizer is distributed at the doors and masks are worn, you are protected. Minas' industry did not stop at any time because of COVID-19... The risk of contagion in the state is one of the lowest in Brazil.”

Roscoe's allegations are based on a direct coverup of the facts. Thousands of victims of respiratory diseases have been buried in Minas Gerais without being tested for COVID-19. Data from the Ministry of Health and the Health Department of the state show that, compared to last year, cases of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome had a jump of 691 percent, and deaths of 838 percent.

Roscoe himself was infected with the coronavirus after joining Brazil's fascistic President Jair Bolsonaro's entourage on a trip to Washington in March, where he met with Donald Trump. Bolsonaro is the political leader of the bourgeois movement for the reopening of the country's economy and has defended a “war against the lockdowns” in the interests of industrialists and shareholders.

Despite the deep crisis shaking the Brazilian state and his government, Bolsonaro has been able to promote the most reactionary and criminal policies associated with the coronavirus crisis, which will lead to the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Brazilians.

After the resignation of two health ministers, the Bolsonaro government succeeded in recommending chloroquine and hydroxychloroquine for all COVID-19 patients last week. The protocol was signed by the interim Minister of Health, General Eduardo Pazuello whom Bolsonaro calls “doctor”, even if he is not.

Tests with hydroxychloroquine were suspended by the World Health Organization (WHO), after the release of a study by the scientific journal *The Lancet* that revealed that the substance was ineffective in treating the disease and increased the risk of death.

But scientific evidence will not stop Bolsonaro in his promotion of chloroquine as the miracle cure of COVID-19, a central piece of his obscurantist campaign to reopen the economy, which is going full steam ahead.

On Monday, he announced to a group of his followers that he will force the reopening of the country's churches. They will join the series of services decreed as essential by the government over the past few weeks. Attacking judicial orders, Bolsonaro speaks openly about imposing his measures by force.

In a Twitter post, Bolsonaro addressed the governors who

“have publicly stated that they will not comply with our Decree No. 10,344/2020, which includes gyms, barbershops and beauty salons as essential activities.” He concluded with the dangerous threat: “To challenge the democratic constitutional state is the worst path, it will bring out the undesirable authoritarianism in Brazil.”

The “undesirable authoritarianism” was expressed last Sunday in front of the Palácio do Planalto, the seat of the government. After flying over the Three Powers Square by helicopter, in a choreographed gesture, Bolsonaro went down to a demonstration. The hysterical far-right gangs were carrying banners expressing support for the armed forces and attacking the Supreme Court. Bolsonaro paraded among them without a mask for 40 minutes, taking pictures and holding children in his lap.

He described it as “another spontaneous [demonstration]. It's a sign that the people want freedom and democracy and they want the president to be allowed to work.” This is a complete lie. These demonstrations are not spontaneous but engineered by groups directly linked to the state. They represent not the feelings of broad layers of the working class, but the interests of the Brazilian ruling class.

Bolsonaro knows that his capitalist policies in response to the coronavirus crisis—to let the population starve and the virus spread, killing thousands—are extremely unpopular and will generate waves of social opposition.

He expressed this clearly in a videotape of a meeting with his ministers on April 22 which was released by court order last week. In it, he said: “The fertile ground appears... some piece of shit... raising the flag of the people... it costs nothing. And that is the fertile ground: unemployment, chaos, misery, social disorder and other things.”



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