

Brazil's President Bolsonaro calls demonstrators "terrorists," threatens military repression

Miguel Andrade
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In a fascist rant delivered during the opening of a field hospital to treat COVID-19 patients, Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro once again denounced demonstrators joining marches in five Brazilian cities held in solidarity with the protests in United States as "terrorists" and "outcasts" aiming to "break the country."

He called for governors to deploy the National Guard against demonstrators taking part in new anti-government marches scheduled for Sunday, a day chosen as an answer to the weekly fascist demonstrations held by Bolsonaro supporters on Sundays. These rallies feature Bolsonaro himself and regularly call for a military coup and hail the brutal history of torture and executions of the 1964–1985 military dictatorship.

Bolsonaro's latest threats came on the heels of a frenzied and terrified reaction by the president and his cabinet to the demonstrations last Sunday by youth joining the global wave of protests against the murder of George Floyd and social inequality, police brutality and racism, as well as the promotion of the latter by the Bolsonaro government. The demonstrations were met with brutal repression unleashed by state-controlled military police soldiers, which in turn protected fascist provocateurs bearing flags of the Ukrainian neo-Nazi Right Sector. Protests have grown as Bolsonaro supporters respond to the US marches by holding Ku-Klux-Klan-like nightly marches with torches at the Supreme Court and Congress in an appeal to the most backward and disoriented members of Brazilian society.

Most significantly, however, Bolsonaro's rant came just three days after an opinion piece published by Vice President Gen. Hamilton Mourão published by Brazil's oldest daily, *Estado de S. Paulo*, calling for demonstrators' forceful seizure and arrest. In the article, Mourão fully endorsed the denunciations by Bolsonaro, aping Donald Trump's rants against "antifa" that the demonstrators were "terrorists" that should be proscribed.

In the opinion piece, Mourão charged that "presenting the last anti-government demonstrations as democratic constitutes a clear abuse" and that it was an abuse to "forget who they are and to portray them as a counterposition to government supporters and transform them into legitimate demonstrators,"

adding that "troublemakers were a police issue and not a matter for politics."

He also resurrected known authoritarian tropes of "outside agitators" to denounce demonstrators for "bringing to our country problems and conflicts of other peoples and cultures." He further railed against the senior member of the Brazilian Supreme Court (STF), Celso de Mello, who warned on Sunday of parallels between Brazil and the Weimar Republic in the years preceding Hitler's takeover, calling the comparison "irresponsible," and dismissing Bolsonaro's fascist rants as "rhetorical excesses," whose condemnation might lead "everyone to lose their senses"—that is to say, would justify a violent reaction of Bolsonaro against the Court.

Mourão is a notorious ultra-right coup-monger, who was twice punished while in active duty for political statements against toothless attempts by Congress to review the horrific crimes of the 1964–1985 military dictatorship. He also presided over the ultra-right Military Club, an association of retired high-ranking officials that was one of the active proponents of the 1964 coup.

But Mourão wrote his Tuesday libel with the authority of someone insistently portrayed as the "adult in the room" of the crisis-ridden Bolsonaro administration by the opposition's former presidential candidates, Fernando Haddad of the Workers Party (PT), Guilherme Boulos of the Socialism and Liberty Party (PSOL), Ciro Gomes of the Democratic Labor Party (PDT) and Governor Flávio Dino of the Communist Party (PCdoB).

The Sunday demonstrations were an initial expression of a long-suppressed class anger against Bolsonaro and the abysmal social inequality that defines Brazilian capitalism. In an act of political cowardice, the PT called for their supporters not to join the demonstrations scheduled for Sunday in order "not to offer the government, what it desires, the environment for authoritarian measures." Hours later, the PT stated they were "in solidarity" with demonstrators and calling for them "to take care and not give in to provocateurs."

There is wide significance to the unleashing of brutal police violence on peaceful demonstrators and the ominous

resurrection of the reactionary dictatorship-era language of “terrorism” and “infiltrators” and “external incitement” by Bolsonaro and Mourão after a week in which Bolsonaro’s bourgeois opposition was celebrating police raids on his supporters as the sign of his demise.

The raids had been ordered by Supreme Court (STF) Justice Alexandre de Moraes, who presides over an inquiry on the incitement of far-right demonstrations against the STF by Bolsonaro supporters. It runs parallel to another inquiry, presided by the justice cited by Mourão, Celso de Mello, on the charges presented by former Justice Minister Sérgio Moro as he resigned, accusing Bolsonaro of interfering in the Federal Police (PF) to protect his son, Rio de Janeiro Senator Flávio Bolsonaro. Moro charged that Bolsonaro wanted to suppress investigations that might tie his family to criminal organizations known as “militias” which control gambling and drug trafficking and were also named as responsible for the death squad murder of Rio de Janeiro City Councilor Marielle Franco in 2018.

Both are now at the center of the impeachment articles presented against Bolsonaro by the bourgeois opposition led by the PT, which claims Bolsonaro’s militia ties, interference in the PF and incitement of the far-right threaten the “internal security” of Brazilian capitalism.

One of the leading proponents of such charges of Bolsonaro as a threat to “internal security” of the Brazilian state, *Estado de S. Paulo* editorialized only a day before Mourão’s threats that “something is moving” in Brazilian society and celebrated that the issuing on Sunday of the so-called “We Are Together” manifesto, a right-wing piece stating that “as was the case with the ‘Direct Elections Now!’” at the end of the 1964-1985 dictatorship, “it is time to leave aside old disputes and seek common good,” calling for “left, center and right” to be united “to defend law, order, politics, ethics, families” and “responsible economics.”

The manifesto brought together virtually all of the bourgeois and petty bourgeois opposition to Bolsonaro, from former President Fernando Henrique Cardoso to billionaire banker Alice Setúbal to former presidential candidates of the pseudo-left Socialism and Liberty Party (PSOL), Guilherme Boulos, Workers Party (PT), Fernando Haddad and his Communist Party running mate, Manuela D’Ávila.

Every major news outlet, from *Globo* to *Estado de S. Paulo*, immediately endorsed the manifesto, which has as a rallying point that Bolsonaro is a threat to Brazilian capitalism for “sowing disorder” by inciting the far-right—that is, that opposing Bolsonaro is necessary from the standpoint of avoiding mass political reaction from the working class.

The apparent contradiction between a paper celebrating the “opposition” to the government in one day and opening its pages for a fascist rant by the vice-president in the next lays bare the unifying feature of such a so-called opposition: its loyalty to bourgeois institutions, and, above all, the repressive

apparatus, which they see as being irreversibly demoralized by Bolsonaro.

That includes the criticism made of the manifesto by former PT President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, who reportedly refused to sign the manifesto after his handpicked candidate for 2018, Fernando Haddad, in order to placate criticism from PT supporters to its right-wing, “law and order” language. The next day, however, he endorsed the right-wing manoeuvres on CNN International on Tuesday by saying the House Speaker Rodrigo Maia would have to choose “one of 36 impeachment petitions against Bolsonaro”—which includes the PT’s own petition accusing Bolsonaro of threatening “internal security”—in a vote.

Even more revealing is the fact that such a “unity” movement is echoing the campaign spearheaded by the pseudo-left PSOL after Bolsonaro’s election. This campaign views Bolsonaro as the product of a subversion of an otherwise healthy Brazilian capitalism through a massive fake news campaign.

All of these forces have even adopted PSOL’s portrayal of Bolsonaro, according to which his chief crime is not the management of Brazilian capitalism and its absolute disregard for workers lives during the COVID-19 pandemic, or his all-out assault on workers social rights, but being tied to Rio’s militias, as “rogue element” of bourgeois rule that should be suppressed in order not to demoralize the bourgeois setup.

Now they are all hailing the fact that the Supreme Court is working to dismantle the “virtual militias” organized by his supporters, possibly uncovering evidence that could be used in PSOL’s petition to annul the 2018 elections because of the spread of “fake news.” Exposing the right-wing character of this whole movement spearheaded by the PT and the pseudo-left PSOL, *Estado de S. Paulo* even compares Bolsonaro to the late Hugo Chavez, an unmistakable pro-imperialist trope that is only the corollary of PSOL’s campaign against Bolsonaro’s “threats” to the bourgeois order.

While Gen. Mourão responds to the objective needs of the Brazilian bourgeoisie as it presides over the world’s most unequal major economy, Bolsonaro’s fascist drive also feeds on the complicity of the bourgeois opposition, which shares his and Mourão’s class interests and fears above all mass social opposition. Such opposition has nothing to do with the massive display of solidarity to US workers and opposition to social inequality and police violence by Brazilian working youth seen since Sunday. This movement must now proceed in conscious opposition to the bourgeois manoeuvres to channel it back behind the capitalist state, tying its hands in face of massive repression.



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