

Brazilian police arrest key ally of Bolsonaro

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Brazil's protracted political crisis entered uncharted territory Thursday with the early morning arrest of Fabrício Queiroz, a key political ally of fascist President Jair Bolsonaro. Queiroz may hold key evidence in relation to Bolsonaro's involvement with organized crime in Rio de Janeiro and even the death squad execution of the city councilor for the Socialism and Liberty Party (PSOL), Marielle Franco, in 2018. The arrest came just days after the arrest of organizers of the so-called "300 of Brazil" fascist group of Bolsonaro supporters and dozens of raids and financial investigations against Bolsonaro allies, including Congress members.

Queiroz was arrested in a country house belonging to Bolsonaro's lawyer, Frederick Wassef, after a year and a half of refusal to testify in a corruption inquiry involving Bolsonaro's eldest son, Flávio, a Senator for the state of Rio de Janeiro. His arrest was ordered by Rio state prosecutors. Along with his wife, Márcia Aguiar, who was not found and is considered a fugitive, he was believed to be actively working to conceal evidence in the investigation.

Queiroz is considered a central piece in multiple investigations involving Bolsonaro and his sons Flávio, Eduardo—a House member for the state of São Paulo—and Carlos—a Rio city councilor. A retired member of the military police, he is known to be a friend of Bolsonaro since 1984, and worked as a fixer for the Bolsonaro clan during the entire period of the president's 28 years as a House backbencher.

His testimony was initially sought in late 2018 as federal and Rio state law enforcement uncovered unusual banking operations in the accounts of Flávio, then a Rio state parliament member. Unusual cash payments by Flávio were the target of routine operations by the federal Financial Activities Council (Coaf), a banking oversight body. The immediate understanding by law enforcement authorities was that Flávio had been involved in a common scheme found in the 27 state parliaments and the more than 5,000 city councils throughout the country, in which elected officials keep part of the official salaries paid to their aides. Queiroz was from early on considered the manager of the scheme within Flávio's office.

The investigations into Flávio and Queiroz just before Bolsonaro's inauguration on January 1, 2019, cast a shadow of corruption over the fascist demagogue, who had sought to make his electoral campaign a referendum on the corrupt political establishment led by the Workers Party (PT) for the better part of the previous 16 years, until the 2016 impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff.

Just after the initial deposition requests by Rio prosecutors,

Queiroz was admitted to the Albert Einstein hospital in São Paulo. Discharged from hospital in early 2019, he was never seen again until Thursday's arrest.

The investigation into the salary kickbacks found that among Flávio's aides suspected of taking part in the schemes managed by Queiroz were relatives of Adriano da Nóbrega, the alleged crime boss of Ronnie Lessa, who is charged with murdering Franco. Nóbrega was then brutally murdered by police in early 2020 at a hideout in the state of Bahia, in what is widely believed to be a rubout operation carried out with the participation or at least knowledge of Bolsonaro. Initial evidence found in material seized with Queiroz Thursday points to his communications with Nóbrega.

Nóbrega was understood to be the head of the so-called "Crime Office" criminal organization, one of Rio de Janeiro's *militias*. The militias are comprised of retired and active duty police officers and soldiers, and have a direct connection to the political death squads of the 1964-1985 military dictatorship.

Since the fall of the dictatorship, the militias established themselves as vigilante groups in impoverished, working class areas of Rio de Janeiro's metro region, in particular to the west and north of the city. Initially under the pretext of fighting petty crime and drug dealing, they established control of public utilities over vast swaths of the region, monopolizing access to gas, electricity, gambling and even construction through intimidation and executions. Later, they came to expel drug dealers in order not to ban, but to monopolize, the sale of cocaine, marijuana and other substances. It is now estimated that no less than 2 million of the 18 million inhabitants of the state of Rio live in areas partially or fully controlled by militias.

Bolsonaro, a former Army captain discharged for planning a barracks bombing and justifying a new military coup in the late 1980s, has regularly praised the militias as substituting for "weak" justice by the state. In 2005, the Rio state parliament bestowed on Nóbrega its highest honor, the Tiradentes Medal honoring what is considered Brazil's first independence martyr, at the request of Flávio Bolsonaro. Defense of the militias has been a far-right trope for decades. However, direct involvement of the Bolsonaro family with their fascist and criminal operations had not been found until the investigation into Flávio Bolsonaro's banking irregularities.

The arrest of Queiroz now threatens Bolsonaro amid multiple offensives by his bourgeois political opponents, who are fearful that his criminal neglect of the COVID-19 pandemic and his mobilization of the far right against Congress, the Supreme Court and social opposition will provoke an explosive mass working class reaction. These forces are also frustrated by the dead-end of

his full alignment with US imperialism and the Trump administration, which has caused geopolitical setbacks with the European Union and Brazil's main commercial partner, China.

While Brazilian presidents cannot be prosecuted while in office for any crimes committed before their inauguration, there is wide expectation that the arrest of Queiroz may uncover evidence of Bolsonaro's continued involvement with the militias. This would possibly include Nóbrega's police execution, or substantiate the charges made by former Justice Minister Sérgio Moro, upon his resignation, that Bolsonaro sought to interfere in the Rio offices of the Federal Police (PF) in order to stall investigations that would implicate himself or his sons. The investigations may also shift a decisive layer of the ruling class toward support for Bolsonaro's impeachment.

As grave as the accusations against Bolsonaro are, what emerges from the latest developments in Brazil is a desperate attempt by growing layers of the bourgeois establishment—first and foremost the PT, which leads the congressional opposition—to divert mass working class anger against Bolsonaro into safe channels, avoiding a mass uprising against rotting Brazilian capitalism. Or, in the infamous words of the open letter for Bolsonaro's resignation penned by opposition leaders of the PT and PSOL, their goal is to remove Bolsonaro in “the least costly way” for Brazil's capitalist ruling class.

The arrest of Queiroz crowned yet another frenzied week in the capital of Brasília, which began with dozens of raids against Bolsonaro's far-right “300 of Brazil” supporters, and the arrest of its leaders.

The “300 of Brazil” group had set up a camp in front of the Supreme Court (SFT) with the stated goal of “Ukrainizing” Brazil, that is, gathering middle class support for a violent fascist putsch in Brazil such as the one sponsored by imperialist powers in 2014 in Ukraine. Their aim was to back Bolsonaro in shutting down Congress and the Supreme Court and wiping out social opposition. The same group had been gathering for months in front of Army headquarters in multiple cities to “call out” troops in support of Bolsonaro. Having attracted virtually no support outside of its organizers, such demonstrations did provoke immense opposition from youth in mass rallies initially in protest against the murder of George Floyd, but which quickly brought out a larger opposition against the government and the far-right.

They also led to both the STF and the Attorney General's office opening investigations into the financing of the fascist rallies, now implicating 10 House members, one Senator, multiple businessmen and also threatening to reach Bolsonaro himself, who has until today claimed he had only attended the demonstrations and had no role in their organization.

The evidence collected by both inquiries is being shared with two other inquiries initiated by the Electoral court, at the request of the pseudo-left PSOL, on the spread of “fake news” by Bolsonaro supporters during the 2018 presidential campaign, which PSOL claims should lead to the annulment of the election results.

What all of these investigations have in common is the portrayal of the massive crisis gripping Brazilian capitalism, leading to the election of a known figure of the far-right underworld, as lightning from a blue sky. The government's criminal policies are presented

as unrelated to the political establishment, being the product of either the actions of a few wealthy figures who bought the election or of the Rio police gangs.

Major newspapers are calling for the Army to dissociate itself from Bolsonaro and accept his impeachment, while the Supreme Court is using the dictatorship-era National Security Law to prosecute the fascists for “subversion.” Most importantly, however, the PT-led opposition has presented articles of impeachment against Bolsonaro charging him with threatening the “internal security” of the Brazilian capitalist state—that is, of fomenting mass opposition.

What has been demonstrated by the experience of the last two years of similar charges presented by the US Democrats against Trump—using alleged “collusion” with Russia as the “threat”—is that the removal of Bolsonaro on such grounds is far from assured. Moreover, its byproduct has been the emergence of the armed forces in the US as the arbiters of the political situation, with Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden indicating that they will decide the fate of the 2020 election by removing Trump—or not—if he doesn't recognize the election results.

If anything, the same process is even further advanced in Brazil, leading Bolsonaro's Government Secretary—akin to a chief-of-staff—the active duty Army Gen. Luiz Eduardo Ramos to warn that, while the Army “isn't thinking” of a coup, the opposition should not “push it” (“esticar a corda”). Bolsonaro himself added three days later, on June 15, that the “fake news” investigations were “starting to push it” (“começar a esticar a corda”).

Most decisively, it has led to the emergence of a pseudo-legal interpretation of a specific article of the Brazilian Constitution—article 142—which states that “any power” may call out the armed forces to maintain order. Leading scholars such as Ives Gandra da Silva Martins and the Attorney General Augusto Aras have claimed this article means that the armed forces should “moderate,” that is, choose a side, in clashes between the branches of government, possibly disobeying the Supreme Court on the orders of the Executive. The debate led incoming STF president Luiz Fux to declare the court to be “the only interpreter” of the Constitution. This was followed by Defense Minister Fernando Azevedo e Silva, also an active-duty general, signing a press release together with Bolsonaro and the vice president, Gen. Hamilton Mourão, stating that the armed forces “don't follow absurd orders,” a clear reference to the investigations against the president and his followers that Bolsonaro claims are “absurd.”

Whatever the political outcome of Queiroz's arrest, it is clear that only the independent intervention of the working class, free from the political straitjacket imposed by the PT and PSOL, can stop the buildup of fascist forces and a police state in Brazil.



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