

Brazil's Workers Party promotes military police in mayoral elections

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The mayoral elections to be held in Brazil between November and December of this year are laying bare the turn by all factions of the ruling class to the hated Brazilian military forces, including its murderous state-based military police corps.

This year's elections are the first to be held nationally after the coming to power of Brazil's fascistic President Jair Bolsonaro. Expressing the essential collaboration of all the established political parties with his brand of authoritarianism, the number of mayoral or vice-mayoral candidates coming from the Armed Forces or the Military Police has doubled this year in relation to the last mayoral elections, held in 2016.

The 2018 election had already seen the tripling of the Congressional caucus composed of former members of the Armed Forces or Military Police. In his first year in office, Bolsonaro filled his cabinet with high-ranking Armed Forces officers—who comprise 36 percent of senior cabinet members—while tripling the number of military officers in the lower echelons of the federal government, including the administration of state companies.

In order to carry out his murderous “herd immunity” policy in response to the devastating COVID-19 pandemic, after two medical experts resigned as health ministers in two months, he named an active duty Army general to the post—an act without precedent even under the dictatorship. He also packed the Health Ministry with unprecedented numbers of military officials.

The first two years of his presidency also saw growing threats by Bolsonaro against the Supreme Court (STF), which is investigating his involvement in organizing far-right demonstrations and interfering in the Rio de Janeiro offices of the Federal Police to shield his son, Senator Flávio Bolsonaro, from corruption investigations.

Military members of the cabinet, such as the ultra-right intelligence chief, Gen. Augusto Heleno, speak openly about “unpredictable consequences” if investigations reach the president, while Supreme Court justices openly consult with the military chiefs over what steps to take next. A pseudo-

legal theory that Article 142 of the Brazilian Constitution allows the president to call out the Army if the Supreme Court or Congress “overstep their duties”—in this case by attempting to hold Bolsonaro to account for criminal activity—has been supported by Attorney General Augusto Aras.

In face of overwhelming social opposition to Bolsonaro's policies, what passes for the “left” opposition to his rule, the Workers Party (PT) and its pseudo-left appendage, the Socialism and Liberty Party (PSOL), are seeking to give a left cover to the essential premise of his rule: that the military is the fundamental arbiter of the political situation in the country.

The vehicle for this campaign is the running of two Military Police officers for mayor and vice-mayor in the states of Bahia and Rio de Janeiro, respectively.

In Salvador, the capital of Bahia, which the PT has ruled for four consecutive terms, the party has chosen as its candidate Military Police Maj. Denice Santiago, even in face of public opposition from the local party constituency. Santiago, who joined the party at the behest of the PT's right-wing Governor Rui Costa, has been grotesquely promoted in racial and gender terms, for heading the military police's special division charged with curbing domestic violence against women. She is pitched as the first black mayor of the city dubbed the “Black Rome,” for having an 80 percent black population and being the foremost center of African-Brazilian religions.

The grim reality is, however, that Bahia's Military Police, after four terms of PT governments, is the second most lethal unit in the country. A full third of its interventions result in deaths, and over 700 people are killed each year, out of a population of just over 15 million.

For its part, the PSOL has chosen as its candidate for vice-mayor Military Police Col. Íbis Souza. The head of the slate, state deputy Renata Souza, has been similarly praised for being the first black woman to head the state legislature's human rights commission. The slate was chosen after the preferred candidate of the party machine, federal deputy

Marcelo Freixo, refused to run, charging that PSOL's electoral coalition was too narrow. Freixo had come in second place in the 2016 mayoral elections, almost beating the Evangelical chauvinist Marcelo Crivella, with the support from a host of Catholic sectarians and business interests.

In the press release announcing the choice of Lieutenant Colonel Souza, the PSOL bent over backwards to appease a youth constituency that it previously sought to attract by denouncing Rio's police, which kills over 1,800 people a year, out of a population of just over 16 million. It stated that Souza's candidacy is "an important indication that policing and human rights can walk together."

The party has always presented the murderous operations of the Military Police as a result of racism against their overwhelmingly black victims, avoiding at any cost an appeal to all working class youth against the whole of the capitalist state.

In both Rio de Janeiro and Salvador, the PT and the PSOL are taking identity politics to its logical conclusion, as a means of lending stability to an ever more violent capitalist state in face of growing social opposition.

Most significantly, both parties are also taking a step further in what has been at the center of their opposition to Bolsonaro: denouncing him not as a threat to workers, but to Brazilian capitalism.

From the first signs that Bolsonaro could be elected in 2018, both the PT and the PSOL sought to frame Bolsonaro as a threat to the interests of the Brazilian ruling class, citing his election as a likely source of commercial and geopolitical isolation, given Bolsonaro's alignment with the unilateral policies of Washington, which clash with European imperialist interests and affect Brazil's relationship with China.

The PT sought to appeal to the military by highlighting Bolsonaro's international isolation on geopolitical issues, with former PT foreign and defense minister Celso Amorim stating that the military could "save Brazilian foreign policy."

For its part, the PSOL, which draws its main electoral strength from Bolsonaro's home state and political base, Rio de Janeiro, has sought to highlight the "damaging" effect to the political establishment of Bolsonaro's involvement with organized crime in the city. To the extent that PSOL uses "human rights" rhetoric to denounce the action of organized crime in Rio, and particularly the vigilante police gangs promoted by Bolsonaro, the "militias," it is out of fear that opposition to the militias and Bolsonaro among workers will turn against the capitalist system itself.

Such efforts culminated in March and April with both the PT and PSOL 2018 presidential candidates calling for

Bolsonaro's resignation and national unity around his vice-president, Gen. Hamilton Mourão, in order to better deal with the COVID-19 pandemic. The PT brought articles of impeachment against Bolsonaro for "threatening the security" of the capitalist state by provoking social opposition with his murderous "herd immunity" policy.

This opposition is an inevitable outcome of the unprecedented growth of social inequality in the last five years of persistent economic crisis, a process vastly accelerated by the criminal policies of the ruling class towards the COVID-19 pandemic. The increasing role of the military, and especially of the murderous and criminal Military Police, is an expression of the objective incompatibility of bourgeois-democratic forms of rule with this social polarization.

Under these conditions, their "left" rhetoric notwithstanding, both the PT and PSOL are covering up for the dangers posed by the growth of the far right within the Brazilian military and police. This is part of an international tendency rooted in the incompatibility of bourgeois-democratic methods of rule with the advanced state of the capitalist crisis. It has found expression in the use of heavily militarized police and anti-immigrant squads to terrorize workers in US cities, and in the massive penetration of German security forces by neo-Nazi elements.

These efforts find an especially fertile soil in the Brazilian military police and have been consciously promoted by Bolsonaro and his 2018 election allies, such as São Paulo Governor João Doria and former Rio de Janeiro Governor Wilson Witzel. All of them sought to make low-ranking Military Police members one of their key constituencies, and sponsored a shoot-to-kill policy which made police murders jump by 30 percent in the first months of 2020 in São Paulo and to the highest number in 22 years in Rio.

That the PT and PSOL are running pro-military campaigns that portray the Military Police as a democratic constituency opposed to Bolsonaro's far right policies, is a damning indictment of the class character of these parties. Despite their heated disputes with Bolsonaro centered on foreign policy, both the PT and the PSOL are more fearful of the working class than of Bolsonaro himself. They are attempting to give the murderous and repressive apparatus of the Brazilian capitalist state a "left" cover out of concern that Bolsonaro is insufficiently prepared to deal with a coming social explosion.



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