

Brazil and Mexico report spikes in COVID-19 deaths as pandemic ravages Latin America

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The two largest countries in Latin America, Brazil and Mexico, have reported accelerated growth of COVID-19 infections and deaths over the past month. They are coming close to surpassing the terrible peaks recorded earlier this year.

Yesterday, Brazil recorded the sinister milestone of 7 million COVID-19 cases, reporting 68,437 new infections—the second highest number in a single day since the pandemic hit the country in March. It also reported 968 deaths, the largest number since mid-September. The coronavirus death toll in Brazil is already 183,822, second only to the United States.

Nevertheless, the numbers reported by Brazil on Wednesday were substantially lower than the reality. The state of São Paulo, which is reporting the highest absolute numbers of cases and deaths, did not release data yesterday, alleging a failure in its system. The day before, it had reported 4,412 contaminations and 232 deaths.

Mexico surpassed 115,000 deaths by COVID-19 on Tuesday, reporting 801 new victims. The country has recorded the fourth-largest number of deaths in the world. With extremely low testing rates, almost 30 times lower than the United States, daily infections have more than doubled in less than a month. On November 20, there were, on average, 3,958 daily cases and today, 10,564, according to Worldometer.

Throughout the Latin American region the virus is spreading savagely. In June, the WHO had declared Latin America the global epicenter of the COVID-19 pandemic. Since then, its countries have experienced practically a continuous wave of devastation.

The situation in Colombia is representative. About 170 people are dying every day from COVID-19 in the country. This average has remained almost the same for three months, after a peak of about 300 deaths a day in August. With the number of contaminations this week once again exceeding 10,000 per day, Colombia has more than 1.4 million cases and 39,356 deaths from the coronavirus.

About 170 people also die every day in Argentina, which has already surpassed 1.5 million cases and 40,000 deaths. A recent growth in the number of cases in the capital, Buenos Aires, considered the epicenter of the pandemic in the country, sounds the alert for a new surge in this South American country.

In a number of Latin American countries, health care systems

are on the verge of collapse. Brazil, which until last week had 31,000 COVID-19 patients hospitalized, is already reaching maximum hospital capacity in several of its state capitals.

With a queue of over 600 COVID-19 patients waiting for a hospital bed, health professionals in Rio de Janeiro are being forced to choose between those who will have a chance to survive and those sent home to die.

On Sunday, *Folha de São Paulo* published an article on the routine of the doctors who do this work at the Rio de Janeiro Hospital Bed Regulation Center. One of the doctors told *Folha*: “It’s not as distressing as being on the hospital floor, of course, but we leave work mentally and emotionally very destroyed. Yesterday a [request for admission] was made for a woman who had just lost her child to COVID and was hospitalized.”

The situation is equally critical in Mexico. With more than 8,000 patients hospitalized, the country has reached its record of COVID-19 hospitalizations, according to the Mexican Social Security Institute (IMSS). The IMSS director Victor Borja warned this week that 95 percent of beds are occupied in the state of Mexico. Borja stated that 700 COVID-19 patients in the region are waiting for treatment, in many cases, for a bed to be available.

In Panama, the hardest hit country in Central America, which is experiencing an exponential rise in infections, hospitals have entered into a state of collapse. With about 4.3 million inhabitants, Panama has almost 1,500 COVID-19 patients hospitalized. Health professionals are working double shifts of 16 hours to attend to the sick.

A new rise of contaminations in Peru, which has one of the highest death rates of COVID-19 per inhabitant in the world, is causing overcrowding of hospitals in the country’s north. In the Piura region, 95 percent of ICU beds are already occupied.

The catastrophic situation in Latin America is the product of the absolutely criminal policies of its capitalist governments in the face of the pandemic. Months ago they lifted every restriction on the spread of the virus, spouting lies about a supposed state of control of the pandemic.

The greatest representative of the policy universally pursued by the Latin American ruling classes is, not by chance, Brazil’s fascist president, Jair Bolsonaro.

Since the pandemic hit Brazil in March, Bolsonaro has openly

and continuously defended the infection of the entire population. In July, when Brazil reached 2 million cases of the disease, Bolsonaro declared a “war on lockdowns” in the name of the capitalist class, stating: “we cannot continue suffocating the economy.”

Notably, although they occupy allegedly antagonistic political camps, there are great similarities between Bolsonaro’s murderous attitude and that adopted by Mexico’s president Andrés Manuel López Obrador, from the Movimiento Regeneración Nacional (MORENA).

López Obrador, just as Bolsonaro, has defended quack cures for the deadly virus, disregarded the use of masks, and incited the population to reject social isolation. AMLO, as the Mexican president is popularly known, prematurely forced the reopening of workplaces, especially of the auto parts industry, essential to reactivate the production chain linked to the US.

With Mexico reaching the worst state of the pandemic, López Obrador, for the first time, according to *El Universal*, called on the population to stay at home during the holiday season. “It’s only these 10 days,” he said. Help everyone, let’s take care of ourselves, because this way we avoid more contagion, [as well as] the saturation of hospitals. Anyway, we’re increasing the hospital capacity.”

This is pure hypocrisy. As it shifts its responsibility onto workers’ shoulders, the AMLO administration is doing nothing to prevent the disease from continuing to spread and kill hundreds every day. The priority of this bourgeois impostor, representative of the Latin American parties falsely identified as “left,” is to preserve profit flows for the capitalist elite.

The workers of Latin America must be aware that the situation of the pandemic is critical. Although governments in the region are announcing vaccination plans, which may begin later this month in countries like Mexico, experts say the vaccination process may well span through 2022. Meanwhile, the death toll is increasing faster every day.

Immediate action must be taken. Social isolation is the necessary measure, according to science, to interrupt the circulation of the virus in society. The wide circulation of people and family gatherings that usually are part of Christmas celebrations, represent a very serious threat. The effects of the recent Thanksgiving holiday on the increase in COVID-19 deaths in the US should serve as a tragic lesson to the international working class.

However, it is impossible to effectively guarantee social distancing and stop the wave of deaths without directly confronting the interests of the capitalist class. It is fundamental to shut down factories, commerce, transportation and all non-essential economic activities. Essential production should be defined by the working class itself according to its social interests, and must be carried out under safety norms formulated and supervised in collaboration with scientists and health professionals.

For as long as necessary, workers away from their jobs must

have the full payment of their wages guaranteed. The resources for implementing this program exist in society, the central question is which class controls them. This truth is especially striking in Latin America, the most unequal region on the planet.

To fight for these measures, workers cannot count on the unions that claim to represent them officially. These organizations are, in fact, radically opposed to this program.

Trade unions—from those linked to López Obrador in Mexico, to those controlled by his allies of the Workers Party (PT) in Brazil—are actively collaborating in the implementation of the corporate attacks on the working class and cover up COVID-19 cases and deaths in workplaces to guarantee the continuation of production.

Likewise, it is impossible to find any word in defense of such measures in the publications of the pseudo-left in Latin America and internationally. For these organizations, which represent the interests of upper-middle-class layers that are increasingly incorporated into the bourgeois state, any interference in the process of capitalist accumulation is ruled out. They are effectively giving political cover for the social murder promoted by the ruling class.

The defense of the lives of the broad strata of the world population is a matter of class struggle. The strikes and mass protests that spread throughout Latin America in the recent period signal the maturing of the consciousness of workers and youth toward the revolutionary tasks that they confront.

The most fundamental of these tasks is the construction of an internationalist and socialist leadership in the working class; that is to build Socialist Equality Parties throughout Latin America and around the world.



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