

As Brazil reaches 200,000 COVID-19 deaths, Bolsonaro sabotages vaccination campaign

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8 January 2021

With the COVID-19 pandemic reaching new catastrophic proportions in Brazil, the country's fascistic President Jair Bolsonaro is actively working to sabotage a vaccination program and take the murderous "herd immunity policy," which he has openly advocated since the arrival of the pandemic in Brazil, to its ultimate consequences.

On Thursday, after more than 1,000 deaths were recorded for the third day in a row, Brazil reached the terrible milestone of 200,000 COVID-19 deaths. High infection rates, which are yet to reflect the explosive impact of holiday events, are reflected in the overcrowding of hospitals throughout the country.

A number of hospitals in São Paulo, the country's largest metropolis, have already reached 100 percent capacity. In Rio de Janeiro, Brazil's second largest city, there is a queue of 164 people waiting for an ICU bed. In Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais' capital, the ICU bed occupation rate is close to 90 percent. Belém do Pará reached 96 percent of the ICU capacity, after the government closed COVID-19 treatment centers.

The most critical situation in the country is, once again, in Manaus. With scenes of patients being cared for amid the dead in overcrowded hospitals and backhoes digging mass graves for victims of COVID-19 still fresh in the city's memory, the Amazonian capital declared a second collapse of its health care system in just nine months.

Almost daily, Manaus has been recording record hospital admissions. On Wednesday, 221 people were hospitalized with COVID-19, a number significantly higher than the peak of 168 recorded in April. On the same day, the occupation of the ICU beds reached 94 percent, approaching the 96 percent reached in April. Private network ICU beds have already reached full capacity.

The calamitous situation inside the hospitals was summarized in an article published by *Folha de São Paulo*: "a scenario of overcrowding, lack of beds, stretchers in the corridors and absence of social distancing." About a week ago, refrigerated chambers were once again installed in the hospitals facing the imminent collapse of their morgues.

On Wednesday, workers at the 28 de Agosto Hospital protested against the conditions faced by health care professionals. "We are not asking any favors, we are asking for help because health care workers are dying," said a radiology technician in the protest, according to *GI*. In this same hospital, workers held a spontaneous strike in April.

The accelerating increase in deaths is causing a new collapse of the funeral system. There was an 84 percent growth in the number of burials in Manaus in the first days of January, compared to the same period in December. On Wednesday, 110 people were buried. The number of people who died in their own homes, regardless of the causes, doubled in December, and increased again sharply in the first days of January.

The city declared a state of emergency on Tuesday. The newly elected mayor of Manaus, David Almeida of the Avante (Forward) party, ordered the emergency digging of 6,000 new graves in the city's cemeteries. He plans to order the digging of 22,000 graves in total.

The reasons for this catastrophe are no mystery. But the claim of the secretary of Health of Amazonas, that "there was a relaxation of the population, despite all our propaganda so that this would not happen," is nothing but a lie. The epidemiologist of Fiocruz Amazonas, Jesem Orellana, declared that, despite having been alerted months ago of the emergence of a second wave of COVID-19 in Manaus, "the extreme gravity of the situation of the epidemic continues to be

minimized by health authorities.”

This second wave of infections was the direct product of the criminal actions of Governor Wilson Lima of the Christian Social Party (PSC). In August, the state schools of Manaus were the first to be reopened nationwide, immediately causing outbreaks of COVID-19 in dozens of schools. The WSWS wrote on that occasion:

“The degree of recklessness of the policy being implemented in Manaus is shocking, if not surprising. A few months ago, the world was shocked by the scenes there of graves being dug by backhoes for thousands of COVID-19 victims after the collapse of the local health care system.”

Educators responded with strikes and protests. The Lima government, assisted by the unions, was able to suppress the strike movement, taking repressive measures such as cutting wages and threatening to replace striking teachers.

In September, an increase in COVID-19 cases and ICU admissions was announced by the government of Amazonas. Instead of closing down the schools, Lima blamed the outbreak on “people in some places making crowds, especially at private parties,” and only restricted the operation of bars. To keep the schools functioning, Lima promoted the idea that Manaus had achieved “herd immunity,” based on studies not endorsed by the academic community. Lima’s policy was not confronted in any of the mainstream newspapers, which instead enthusiastically reported these same studies.

Wilson Lima’s criminal policy is no exception. It was adopted by the ruling class as a whole throughout Brazil. Its principles were dictated and are still being taken to their ultimate conclusion by President Jair Bolsonaro.

Only by the middle of this week did Bolsonaro sign a bill freeing up the purchase of COVID-19 vaccines. At this occasion, the Minister of Health, Gen. Eduardo Pazuello, said that vaccinations will begin simultaneously in January throughout the country.

However, the government cancelled the purchase of 331.2 million syringes needed for the application of the vaccines, only acquiring 7.9 million units. Bolsonaro stated that in the face of an increase in prices, his government “suspended the purchase until prices return to normal.” And, although Pazuello and Bolsonaro say

there are enough syringes to start the vaccination process, the National Association of Mayors declared that these supplies must “attend to several procedures, among them the National Immunization Plan.”

At the same time that he is deliberately disorganizing the vaccination program, Bolsonaro has made virulent attacks against the vaccine itself. He has insisted that the vaccines can cause unknown side effects and that he himself will not take one. On Thursday morning, speaking to his supporters in front of the governmental palace, he said: “As far as I know, less than half [of the population] will take the vaccine. And this polling that I do, I do on the beach, I do on the street, I do everywhere.”

Bolsonaro insistently proclaims that “it’s no use hiding from the virus, this virus will stay in us all our lives.” There is a class logic behind this sociopathic policy. He is signaling to the capitalist class, through his normalization of deaths, that he’s willing to implement the most violent and dictatorial measures against the working class in order to maintain a high degree of exploitation and social inequality, which are the necessary consequences of maintaining the capitalist order.



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