

Threat of fascistic coup grows in Brazil amid COVID vaccination failure

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Vaccination of Brazil's population against COVID-19 began on Monday. As in the rest of the world, after an intense media campaign around the vaccination, which was at the same time aimed at stifling any discussion of necessary social measures to combat the pandemic, the actual distribution of the vaccine in the country is proving a fiasco.

The government of Brazil's fascistic President Jair Bolsonaro foresees the immunization of less than 50 million of the more than 200 million Brazilians in the first phase of its vaccination program, lasting four months. The rest of the population is supposed to be vaccinated afterwards, over an estimated period of 12 months, that is, well into 2022.

However, the first phase of the program is already quite compromised. The government has only six million doses of the vaccine available, enough to immunize three million people with the two doses needed. The production of the remaining vaccines is absolutely paralyzed.

The country is waiting for shipments from China to continue the production of the Coronavac vaccine, which is being manufactured by the Butantan Institute in São Paulo, and there is still no forecast for their arrival. The production of the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine, which will be made by Fiocruz in Brazil, has not even started. After a commercial imbroglio, a shipment of 2 million vaccines from India should arrive tonight in Brazil.

Meanwhile, COVID-19 infections and deaths are growing at a frenetic pace. On Wednesday, Brazil registered 1,382 new deaths, the worst number in the last five months, followed by 1,316 deaths on Thursday. The country also registered more than 60,000 daily cases on Tuesday and Wednesday, and 59,119 cases on Thursday, bringing the average number of infections to the highest level since the beginning of the pandemic.

Last week, the total collapse of the health system in the Amazonian capital, Manaus, shocked the country. The exhaustion of oxygen reserves in hospitals led to the deaths of several patients by asphyxia. This obscene situation was repeated in the neighboring state of Pará, where seven patients died on Tuesday night due to oxygen shortages in a hospital in the city of Coari.

Infectologists have indicated the incidence of a new, more

infectious variant of the virus as the key factor in the explosion of a second and more intense wave of cases in Amazonas. This new Brazilian variant, which has genetic characteristics in common with those recently discovered in South Africa and the United Kingdom, was found in more than 40 percent of infected patients tested in late December in Manaus. Its inevitable spread throughout the country makes immediate action to halt the pandemic even more urgent.

Prominent Brazilian physician and scientist Miguel Nicolelis, who took over the coordination of the scientific commission of the Consórcio do Nordeste (Northeastern Consortium) dedicated to fighting the pandemic in that region of Brazil, has been warning of the disastrous consequences of keeping economic activities open.

He tweeted on January 4: "It's over. The Brazilian equation is the following: Either the country enters a national lockdown immediately, or we won't be able to bury our dead in 2021."

In a statement to *El País* on January 18, Nicolelis declared: "The impact of this synchronized advance of the virus throughout Brazil tends to be worse than the first wave. The vaccine will take months to take effect here, and at this moment we have a minimum percentage of doses. It is time to reimplement the restrictive measures."

No political force of the Brazilian establishment proposes to carry out these urgently needed measures. Nicolelis himself said that the states that make up the Consórcio do Nordeste, governed by the Workers Party (PT), the Maoist Communist Party of Brazil (PCdoB), and their allies, had promoted irresponsible economic re-openings that "generated agglomerations that synchronize the second wave throughout the country."

Not even the limited lockdowns, with partial closure of economic activities and control of population flows, adopted by these states in the first half of 2020, are being considered today.

The disagreements between sections of the Brazilian ruling class exclude policies needed to save hundreds of thousands of lives threatened by the spread of the virus. However, the divisions within the Brazilian state are deepening in the face of the protracted COVID-19 crisis. The national economy is facing an impasse as part of the world capitalist crisis, along with growing geopolitical conflicts and the discontent of the

Brazilian masses subjected to impoverishment and mounting COVID-19 deaths.

The crisis caused by the breakdown in vaccine production and the collapse of the health care system in Manaus have pushed new sections of the bourgeois establishment into opposition against Bolsonaro. The Bolsonaro government's foreign policy, hostile to China and aligned with the US, has been blamed by many for the delay in imports of vaccine ingredients from China. Discussions on Bolsonaro's impeachment were also resumed this week, driven by accusations of criminal negligence by his government in Manaus.

Recently released documents from the Ministry of Health headed by Gen. Eduardo Pazuello show that on January 4 the government already recognized the "imminent possibility of collapse of the health system in 10 days." On January 8, six days before oxygen reserves ran out, the ministry was warned of the "possible shortage" in Manaus by the local oxygen producer and advised to "seek other sources for the product."

The Attorney General's Office (PGR) has summoned Pazuello to explain why over the following 15 days he did not provide oxygen reserves to Manaus, even after repeated warnings. In addition to its failure to guarantee oxygen, the ministry imposed the "preventive" administration of medications that lack any proven efficacy in the treatment of COVID-19, chloroquine and ivermectin, to patients in Manaus.

Last Friday, the PGR received a request for opening criminal proceedings against Bolsonaro, signed by more than 300 public figures, among them jurists, medical authorities and former ministers of state. They demanded that the president be denounced for public health failures, public attacks on vaccinations, promotion of drugs that lack any scientific basis and gross negligence in Manaus.

In response to these developments, the Attorney General of the Republic Augusto Aras published a note on Tuesday declaring his refusal to investigate the president and other executive officials. He defended the preservation of "institutional stability" in the face of "the expectation of a worsening of the health crisis in the coming days." Aras advocated that "the state of public calamity [decreed with the arrival of the pandemic in Brazil] is the antechamber of the state of defense."

Aras' distortion of the Brazilian Constitution represents a serious danger to democracy. By forging the concept of an "antechamber of the state of defense," he is allowing the current legal situation in Brazil to be interpreted as a state of exception, i.e., the suspension of democratic rights. This threat is all the more significant in the face of Bolsonaro's response to the attempted fascist coup by Trump's supporters in the US.

Bolsonaro responded to the January 6 coup by defending Trump's allegations that the US elections were rigged and threatened to repeat the same accusations in Brazil, launching a coup if he is not reelected in 2022. In recent days, these threats

have been exacerbated.

He is portraying all criticism of his government, and particularly of Minister Eduardo Pazuello, an active-duty Army general, as attacks on the Armed Forces themselves. He is seeking in this way to rally the military behind his fascistic objectives.

On Monday, the president declared to his supporters and the extreme-right press that "we the military are the last obstacle to socialism. Who decides whether a people will live in a democracy or a dictatorship is their Armed Forces."

On Wednesday, in celebration of the Brazilian Air Force's 80th anniversary, Bolsonaro gave a speech praising the military as the "major base for fulfilling our [government's] mission." He declared, "Brazil has been experiencing change over the past two years. One of the most important: We have a President of the Republic who, together with his staff and ministers, believes in God and respects the military, a rare fact in the last three decades in our country."

Bolsonaro is the first president, since the end of the military dictatorship that ruled Brazil from 1964 to 1985, who openly proclaims his links to this bloody regime and characterizes his own government as having a military base. He responded to criticism of his administration with a violent threat: "Depending on where these fires are coming from, we are sure we are on the right track. ... But the few sectors that are rowing in the opposite direction, be sure: you will be defeated."

These threats must be taken very seriously by the Brazilian working class. It is the workers—not the spineless bourgeois opposition with the PT at its head—who are the ones "rowing in the opposite direction" of Bolsonaro. It is the working class, which is fighting against both social inequality and being sent to death in infected workplaces, that represents the only alternative to the fascistic program of the current government. This can be realized only through the fight for socialism.



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