

Brazilian Workers Party, pseudo-lefts use COVID-19 vaccination disputes to cover up herd immunity policy

Miguel Andrade
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Barely 10 days after initiating its long-announced COVID-19 vaccinations program, Brazil is already facing shortages of vaccines, with local governments announcing the decision to delay the administering of the second dose in order to maximize the number of those covered by the first dose.

Vaccination delays have been recorded worldwide, exposing previous predictions by governments of a quick rollout as another attempt to lure the working class into accepting the herd immunity policies of the ruling class. In Brazil, delays have been blamed by congressional leaders and the corporate press almost exclusively on a retaliation by Chinese and Indian authorities against the pro-US diplomacy touted by the administration the fascistic President Jair Bolsonaro.

The widely held assumption voiced by editorial boards is that both China and India, responsible for a vast portion of worldwide pharmaceutical products manufacturing, were deliberately delaying the shipment of vaccines and vaccine inputs for Brazil.

The shipment delays were known a day after the country's drug regulatory agency, the Anvisa, gave emergency approval for two vaccines in an extraordinary meeting on Sunday, January 17, broadcast live by major cable news networks. Anvisa granted emergency use for two vaccines with scheduled production in Brazil attached to a technological transfer: the CoronaVac, a traditional inactivated virus vaccine designed by the China-based Sinovac Life Sciences, and the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine.

The CoronaVac was already in production in the state of São Paulo, being sponsored by local authorities, and was the first to be available in the country, with six million doses being shipped nationwide from São Paulo following the Anvisa meeting. However, on Monday, January 18, the federal Fiocruz laboratory responsible for the tests and production of the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine made public that its production was still awaiting supplies from China that should be already in its possession, according to the contract with the pharmaceutical company. Shortly thereafter, the São Paulo government declared that exports of ingredients for further CoronaVac production were also facing unexplained delays.

The Bolsonaro government immediately turned to India, led by the far-right Narendra Modi, seen as a key ally in the anti-China alliance sponsored by US imperialism and portrayed by the Brazilian government as a close ally of Bolsonaro himself. India, a major producer of the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine, gave no immediate guarantee of rescuing the Bolsonaro administration, later shipping only two million doses to Brazil.

The Chinese shipments were cleared after the Chinese ambassador spoke on separate occasions with a host of authorities, including the House Speaker Rodrigo Maia and ministers tied to leading business sectors highly dependent on exports to China, such as Minister for Agriculture Tereza Cristina.

While no official source confirmed the retaliation by either India or China, a January 27 report by Afonso Benites in *El País* revealed that the toning down of criticism of Chinese 5G equipment suppliers, chiefly Huawei, by the Bolsonaro administration was one of the conditions for the clearance of the vaccine exports.

Huawei is widely expected to win major contracts for 5G infrastructure to be auctioned in Brazil later this year. However, it is facing a threat of a ban spearheaded by the Trump administration, based on the unsubstantiated assumption that its equipment was purposely vulnerable or even outright integrated into China's spying infrastructure.

In the case of India, longtime Brazilian correspondent in Geneva Jamil Chade reported that Indian authorities explicitly blamed the worldwide vaccinations shortages on the position prevailing within imperialist governments and supported by Brazil in opposition to the abolition of intellectual property rights over vaccines, advanced by India.

The apparently quick resolution of the crisis, with the frenzied mobilization of what are deemed "moderate" and pragmatic elements within the Brazilian government and Congress, did not stop the leading conservative paper in the country, the *Estado de S. Paulo*, from calling for the first time for Bolsonaro's impeachment. Two days later, it was followed by a positive nod to his removal by its main "progressive" rival, *Folha de S. Paulo*.

Both papers, which have repeatedly called for Bolsonaro's resignation in favor of his vice president, reacted strongly to the crisis in their editorials. They reacted to Bolsonaro's endorsement of the January 6 fascist coup in Washington D.C. with soporifics about the "checks and balances" of Brazilian democracy. They have found it unbearable that Bolsonaro has led Brazil into a diplomatic crisis with its main trading partner, China, without having a backup plan after being frustrated by his pro-US turn after Trump's electoral defeat.

Estado de S. Paulo editorialized: "The most inept president in the nation's history only hangs onto his office, which he was never up to, because there are not yet political circumstances for his constitutional removal."

But the paper also made it clear that the Brazilian ruling class finds itself in a blind alley.

“These political circumstances depend chiefly on an understanding not regarding the many crimes against the office he has already committed, now more than enough for a robust impeachment trial, but regarding the project for the country that one intends to substitute for the angry populism of Bolsonaroism.”

Two days later, *Folha* editorialized in its typical spineless fashion: “For this paper, an impeachment trial is an extreme recourse, as well as slow and always traumatic. Unfortunately, there is no ignoring Bolsonaro’s indignant attitude, nor the almost 60 impeachment petitions already presented.”

On the same day, *Estado* struck a tone of urgency in its impeachment call with special focus on diplomatic relations, stating, “Jair Bolsonaro’s remaining in office makes impossible the recovery of the country’s image and resuming of positive and peaceful contacts with all nations.”

Last Thursday, in an unprecedented move exposing a widening crisis within the government, Vice President Hamilton Mourão said the government could fire Foreign Minister Ernesto Araújo. A fanatical ultraright anti-Chinese Bolsonaro loyalist, Araújo was commended by Trump’s Secretary of State Mike Pompeo two days before the Washington putsch with a tweet reading: “There is no more freedom-loving FM than you. You, me, liberty. Game on.” Araújo’s head is viewed as the strongest signal that could be sent to Chinese authorities of a change of course by the Brazilian government.

In a further sign of the negotiations taking place in Congress, yesterday Mourão fired an aide who had leaked messages to the press in which he discussed with congressional aides the need to “be prepared” for an impeachment, implying the need to articulate support for a caretaker administration by the vice president.

Most significantly, the leading opposition party in Congress, the Workers Party (PT), immediately reacted to the opening rifts by attempting to solve the conflict laid out by *Estado* regarding the divisions that would follow Bolsonaro’s impeachment. The former chief of staff under President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, José Dirceu, told the *Poder360* website that “our task is to transform the impeachment into a popular movement,” that is, to provide a “democratic” cover for the backroom deals in Brasília and the right-wing forces vying for state power.

On Saturday, the PT-controlled unions organized small motorcades in 30 cities. In São Paulo, the rally was led by Guilherme Boulos of the pseudo-left Socialism and Liberty Party (PSOL), who led PSOL to an electoral breakthrough in the mayoral elections in São Paulo in 2020, placing second with 41 percent of the vote.

Attempting to give a left cover to the conflicts expressed by the corporate media, Boulos declared that “the day was coming” for Bolsonaro’s removal. On Sunday, the far-right movements, which had spearheaded demonstrations in 2015 and 2016 appealing to the military and even Donald Trump to “rescue” Brazil from the PT government, held their own rallies against Bolsonaro.

These rifts are emerging as the country records the highest rolling average of COVID-19 deaths since July of 1,055 deaths a day, along with more than 51,000 new cases a day. Brazil has already recorded over 221,000 COVID-19 deaths and 9.1 million cases, and trails only the United States in the number of dead.

The country is also on track to face its worst moment in the pandemic so far, as the north of the country faces a horrific collapse of its health care system, with patients dying for lack of oxygen in ICU units, and doctors reporting the need to administer morphine to those suffocating to alleviate their pain before death.

Brazil’s health minister, Gen. Eduardo Pazuello, was dispatched to the Amazonian capital of Manaus, the epicenter of the crisis, on Saturday, January 23. Just two days before, Supreme Court Justice Ricardo Lewandowski authorized the Attorney General’s Office to investigate Pazuello for ignoring repeated warnings by state authorities that the city’s oxygen supplies were running low.

On Friday, Pazuello declared that no less than 1,500 patients would have to be flown out of the city of two million, which is cut off by land from the rest of the country by the Amazon jungle. The transfers are certain to spread the virus to the rest of the country as a newly identified strain of the virus, which shares many of the genetic characteristics with the English and South African variants, is believed to be more contagious than the original one.

Support for impeachment has grown to include a majority of the population for the first time since the height of the pandemic in May, without a doubt a reaction to the vaccination debacle and the government’s indifference towards the suffering in Manaus. But the pompous rhetoric about this debacle within ruling circles is just a cover for their fundamental unity around the policy of herd immunity.

All factions of the ruling class opposing Bolsonaro—as well as their petty-bourgeois acolytes such as Boulos, the PSOL and union leaders—claim their opposition is driven by Bolsonaro’s criminal and sadistic handling of the pandemic. Yet none of their representatives ever mentions the only urgent measure capable of avoiding the horrific tragedy unfolding in Brazil: a full shutdown of nonessential sectors of the economy, with full income compensation for workers and ruined small businesses.

Nothing makes such unity clearer than the corporatist demand by the PT-controlled São Paulo teachers union, the APEOESP, that teachers should be vaccinated before the reopening of schools scheduled for February 8. While the union feigns concern for teachers’ health, it does not oppose the essential objective of the reopening of schools, i.e., to facilitate a deadly reopening of the economy in the name of capitalist profits being hurt by limited closures still in place.

There is no single faction of the ruling class or the self-styled opposition and its supporters in the pseudo-left willing to raise that demand. The Morenites of *Esquerda Diário*, who recently doubled down on their defense of quack cures for COVID-19 such as hydroxychloroquine, posted an editorial in response to the Brazilian political crisis headlined, “Against Bolsonaro and [São Paulo governor] Doria, let us fight for a universal vaccination.” It simply repeats, with radical-sounding phrases, the criticisms in the corporate press about the vaccination debacle without ever mentioning the shutdown of production.

Stopping the carnage of the COVID-19 pandemic caused by the herd immunity policies of the ruling class requires the organization of workers into rank-and-file committees independent of the trade unions in a conscious struggle against the bankrupt and homicidal system that places profits above human lives.



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