

Brazil worsening pandemic: a threat to humanity

Tomas Castanheira
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After crossing the grim milestone of 250,000 deaths and 10 million COVID-19 cases last week, Brazil has faced a sharp escalation of the pandemic in recent days.

This week, the country has seen two record death tolls in a row, with a total of 1,726 on Tuesday, and 1,840 on Wednesday. As another 1,699 deaths were registered on Thursday, the death toll in Brazil reached 260,970. The country also recorded the highest number of new infections in the world on Wednesday, 74,376 in total, which was even larger on Thursday, surpassing 75,000.

As Brazil rapidly emerges as the world epicenter of the pandemic, the country's ruling class and all its political parties are clashing ever more directly with the scientific prescriptions for combating the coronavirus.

Major Brazilian scientific authorities point to the catastrophic risks posed by the rampant growth of the virus in Brazil, not only to the country's population, but to all of humanity. In an article published by in the *Guardian* on Wednesday, neuroscientist Miguel Nicolelis described Brazil as an "open-air laboratory for the virus to proliferate and eventually create more lethal mutations." He added: "This is about the world. It's global."

This "open-air laboratory" for the ruling class' anti-scientific policy of herd immunity has already been responsible for the creation of a dangerous mutation of the coronavirus in the Brazilian state of Amazonas. A new study published in the scientific journal *The Lancet* suggests that this Brazilian variant, known as P.1, "might escape from neutralizing antibodies induced by an inactivated SARS-CoV-2 vaccine," as is the case with the main vaccine being distributed in Brazil, Coronavac. The study also indicates that the new strain is "able to escape from responses generated by prior SARS-CoV-2 infection, and thus, reinfection may be plausible."

In another interview, conducted by *El País* just hours before the report of Wednesday's record deaths, Nicolelis made a serious warning: "The possibility of crossing 2,000 daily deaths in the coming days is absolutely real. The possibility of crossing 3,000 deaths daily in the next few

weeks is now real. If you have 2,000 deaths per day in 90 days, or 3,000 deaths in 90 days, we are talking about 180,000 to 270,000 people killed in three months. We would double the number of deaths. That's already a genocide, it's just that no one has used the term yet." Faced with this prognosis, Nicolelis argues that "we need to enact lockdowns of at least 21 days and pay financial aid so that people stay home."

The most open enemy of this policy is Brazil's fascist President Jair Bolsonaro, who since May of last year has decreed a "war on lockdowns." Responding to the soaring death toll of the last week, Bolsonaro denounced the spread of "panic" over the pandemic. "The problem is there, we are sorry. But you cannot live in panic," he told his supporters and the far-right press on Wednesday. "As far as I'm concerned, we will never have a lockdown. Never," he added.

Expressing his intention to smash any policy of social isolation that is implemented in Brazil, the president tweeted on Thursday: "ESSENTIAL ACTIVITY IS EVERYTHING NECESSARY FOR A HEAD OF HOUSEHOLD TO BRING BREAD INSIDE HIS HOME!" The true meaning of this grotesque statement is: "essential activity is everything necessary for the financial oligarchy to pour exorbitant profits into their accounts!"

Although Bolsonaro expresses it most nakedly, the policy of social murder is being widely adopted by governments all over Brazil. In an article entitled "*Catarinenses* are being sent to 'death row' in the name of the economy," journalist Dagmara Spautz of NSC Total compared the situation in Santa Catarina, one of the most severe in the country, to the health care collapse in Bergamo, Italy, in March of last year:

"There are no army trucks carrying our dead. But we have an army of people circulating from Monday to Friday, with few restrictions and high risk of infection. Meanwhile, the waiting line for ICU beds has already reached 260 people. ...

"Just as in Italy, the corporate organizations in Santa Catarina repudiate the lockdown, pointed out by experts as the most effective way to reduce the pressure on the health

system. The manifestos came from commerce, transportation and even industry, which has never stopped in Santa Catarina. ...

“Without political representation and without a voice, Santa Catarina citizens are being sent to ‘death row.’ Silenced by shortness of breath, many will never return home. Later, as the Italian example shows, perhaps only apologies will be sent.”

This socially sensitive analysis is rare in the media, but provides an extremely accurate portrayal of what is happening throughout Brazil. In São Paulo, the state hardest hit by COVID-19, which on Monday reported a record 468 deaths in a single day, Governor João Doria of the Brazilian Social Democratic Party (PSDB) has adopted a policy that differs only superficially from that of Bolsonaro.

Despite stating on Wednesday that São Paulo is “on the verge of a health care collapse” and that “urgent, collective measures” are needed, the governor decreed a partial closure of activities that permits, for example, the operation of churches and religious temples. And, most importantly, he doesn’t back down an inch from his criminal policy of reopening the largest school district in Brazil.

Secretary of Education of São Paulo Rossieli Soares, a fanatical defender of school reopenings, declared this week that “schools should be available to those who need them most.” Questioned by *O Estado de São Paulo* about to whom he is referring as “those most in need,” he replied: “It is the family that will decide. If the family wants it, the school will have to offer it.”

Nor are there any essential political differences posed by the governments of the self-declared left opposition to Bolsonaro, headed by the Workers Party (PT). Until last week, the aforementioned neuroscientist Miguel Nicolelis held the position of coordinator of the scientific committee to fight the pandemic of the Northeast Consortium. Of the nine governments that constitute the Consortium, four are run by the PT, two by the Brazilian Socialist Party (PSB) and one by the Maoist Communist Party of Brazil (PCdoB).

Without openly criticizing these governments, Nicolelis’ departure from the Consortium’s scientific committee laid bare the immense chasm between the capitalist policies that they have adopted and the determinations of science. This was made even more explicit by the measures taken by them this week in face of the advance of COVID-19.

The governor of Piauí and also president of the Northeast Consortium, Wellington Dias of the PT, announced this week that he will maintain restrictive measures until March 15. Wednesday’s epidemiological bulletin of the state health secretariat indicated a 71 percent rise in the moving average of deaths. Like the PSDB in São Paulo, Dias defended the reopening of classrooms in the state: “We kept the schools

open because we noticed that the number of infections happening in schools was considered low and this means that the protocols were followed.”

A similar attitude was taken by the governor of Ceará, Camilo Santana of the PT, in a state that in February registered the highest number of COVID-19 deaths since August last year, 573 in total. Rephrasing a school closure decree from February 17, the Ceará government has defined the operation of schools for children up to the age of three as an essential activity—with the clear intention of ensuring that parents have somewhere to leave their young children while going into potentially deadly workplaces.

The course of the past year has proven that no force linked to the capitalist state offers a genuine basis for a scientific policy to combat the pandemic. The accomplishment of this task necessarily depends on a struggle against capitalism and its reactionary national state system.

As the Brazilian researcher Ester Sabino from the University of São Paulo, coordinator of the group responsible for the genomic mapping of the P.1 COVID-19 variant, correctly stated to the *New York Times*: “You can vaccinate your entire population and control the problem only for a short period if, elsewhere in the world, a new variant appears. It will arrive in your country one day.”

The warnings made by these progressive scientists can find an effective response only through the intervention of the sole social force capable of transforming their fundamental discoveries into concrete policies: the international working class, mobilized on the basis of a socialist program for the rational planning of the global economy.



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