

Dozens subpoenaed under Brazil's "national security" law for calling Bolsonaro "genocidal"

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With Brazil's COVID-19 catastrophe raging unchecked—reaching a rapidly rising average of 77,000 cases and 2,500 deaths a day, and a total of 12.5 million cases and 312,000 deaths—the government of fascistic President Jair Bolsonaro is rapidly erecting the framework of a police state.

In the last month alone, over 30 individuals have been subpoenaed under the country's anti-subversion National Security Law, a draconian piece of legislation enacted under the last president of the 1964-1985 US-backed military dictatorship with the stated goal of giving the military control over future civilian governments.

On March 19, the conservative daily *Estado de S. Paulo* reported that the first two years of the Bolsonaro government had seen the expansion of the use of the law by a staggering 285 percent, with a total of 77 inquiries into alleged violations of the law, as opposed to 20 over the two previous years.

The recent crackdown began on March 4, with the targeting of 24-year-old João Reginaldo Jr. for a social media post related to an official presidential visit to his city, the agribusiness hub of Uberlândia, in the state of Minas Gerais. Reginaldo Jr. had asked on Twitter if anyone wanted to become a "national hero" during the president's visit, suggesting some public display of opposition would attract widespread support.

Reflecting Bolsonaro's own extreme sensitivity to the explosive social conditions in Brazil, where 22 million more people have been thrown into poverty, the tweet was taken as a threat to national security. The intelligence unit of the Minas Gerais state Military Police took Reginaldo Jr. into custody by 10 p.m. the same day, barely six hours after his tweet, which received 400 responses, some of them suggesting violent opposition to the government. Despite Reginaldo Jr.'s small following of just 150 people, his post had been shared 1,000 times. At the local Federal Police headquarters, Reginaldo Jr. was questioned about his connections to political parties or student unions, which he denied. He was sent to prison, being released only the next day.

By March 18, a group of Uberlândia attorneys following the case had already identified 25 individuals, overwhelmingly young people, who had been subpoenaed in relation to the case without any knowledge of possible crimes they were involved in, for simply responding to or re-tweeting Reginaldo Jr.'s original message.

Also on March 18, five Workers Party (PT) activists were detained in the capital Brasília by the local Military Police and brought to the Federal Police precinct accused of violating the National Security Law for associating Bolsonaro with Nazism and genocide. Their "crime"

was unfurling for barely a minute a banner bearing a cartoon of Bolsonaro painting a swastika over a hospital's red cross, with the caption "genocidal."

The cartoon had been produced by the cartoonist Aroeira in June, 2020 at the height of the first wave of the pandemic in Brazil, and was shared on social media by Ricardo Noblat, a columnist with the powerful Globo media group. On June 15, both were charged by Justice Minister André Mendonça with falsely accusing the president of associating with Nazism, which itself is a crime under the National Security Law.

The local Federal Police deputy in Brasília eventually dismissed the case against the PT activists after party deputies flocked to the precinct.

In another high profile case three days earlier, on March 15, a 33-year-old YouTube personality known as Felipe Neto, whose social media channels boast more than 41 million followers, was subpoenaed on the basis of similar charges by the Rio de Janeiro state police cyber crimes division. It issued a warrant against him for carrying out a "crime against the honor of the president of the Republic provided for in the National Security Law." The reason for the charge was Neto's repeated use of the term "genocidal" to refer to Bolsonaro and his sociopathic handling of the coronavirus pandemic in Brazil.

As was later revealed, the charge had been brought by none other than Bolsonaro's son, Carlos, a city councillor in Rio. The investigation was suspended three days later, on March 18, by a judge who ruled that national security issues could not be handled by the Rio police and should be directed to the Federal Police.

While the case against the PT activists was dismissed by the intervention of the party, and the case of Felipe Neto is suspended due in large measure to his prominent social media presence in Brazil—defenses not shared by the 25 unknown youth charged in Uberlândia—the March "national security" scare poses the gravest dangers. It not only exposes the accelerating buildup of a police state under the weight of the vast crisis gripping bourgeois rule, but also reveals the fascistic moods being cultivated among low-ranking state police forces, the most solid constituency for the far right in Brazil.

In all three March cases, individuals were subpoenaed, charged or detained by state police forces. Given that investigations or enforcement under the National Security Law are part of the federal legal framework, these actions amount to rogue demonstrations of loyalty to the would-be Brazilian dictator Bolsonaro in the face of his growing political isolation. Brazil's state-based Military Police kill over 6,000 Brazilians a year, and are virtually immune to prosecution

under their own Military Justice system.

Bolsonaro has made one of his mottos the call for security forces “not to obey absurd orders,” referring to the enforcement of search and seizure warrants related to corruption probes against himself, his family or his political associates. And on March 8 he declared that “my army will not go to the streets to enforce governors’ decrees,” referring to mild restrictions on economic activity imposed by local authorities in Brazil in order to avoid an even more horrific COVID-19 death toll.

On March 8 Bolsonaro told supporters that the limited curfews in some cities amount to a “state of siege.” He threatened to “react” by imposing his own state of siege in order to ensure unrestricted economic activity and let the virus spread unchecked. “Is the Brazilian population prepared for a federal government action on that front?” he asked.

In direct response to Bolsonaro’s appeals, on March 22, the president’s birthday, dozens of fascists dressed in army fatigues and red berets, identifying themselves as members of the airborne infantry—Bolsonaro’s own branch of the Army in the 1970s and 1980s—marched in front of his private home in Rio de Janeiro. A video of the event included the threat of civil war in Bolsonaro’s defense. “If you want to impeach our president, remember he is not alone,” the video’s narrator warned. Addressing himself to “lefties,” he concluded, “you’d better gather the best you’ve got and try it.”

In response to a question from *TV Globo*, the Eastern Military Command stated that there was “no relation between the institution and the event cited,” adding that “the Brazilian Army does not condone any type of illicit conduct on the part of its members.” It made no attempt, however, to deny that those involved in the fascist march were indeed active-duty paratroopers.

Rogue police elements are also responding to earlier calls by Rio de Janeiro’s Military Club, the 133-year-old center of military coupplotters in Brazil, for the National Security Law to be used against the left. This came in response to the Brazilian Supreme Court (STF) ordering the arrest of federal Deputy Daniel Silveira, a former Rio de Janeiro Military Police soldier and Bolsonaro loyalist, for demanding the shutdown of the court.

On Sunday, this political struggle between the various political representatives of the ruling class to show which is more loyal to the military apparatus took to another stage, in response to what authorities described as a psychotic episode on the part of a Military Police soldier in the state of Bahia, ruled by the Workers Party (PT). The soldier, Wesley Soares Góes, broke into a section of beach cordoned off as part of the state’s COVID-19 restrictions, and started shooting in the air, shouting that he would “not allow the violation of the dignity and honor of workers,” and “I am not going to arrest workers anymore; I didn’t join the police to arrest fathers of families.”

After several hours of negotiations, Góes started shooting at the BOPE special operations troops sent to seize him, and was brutally gunned down with 10 shots. While what precisely prompted Góes’ outburst is as yet unknown, the episode was immediately seized upon by the far right, which cast him as an anti-lockdown martyr. The episode was cited by no one less than the head of the House Constitutional Committee, the Bolsonaro loyalist Bia Kicis, who tweeted that it was the beginning of a mutiny by state Military Police forces against governors, concluding with Bolsonaro’s rallying cry: “enough with obeying absurd orders!”

The latest developments lay bare the political criminality of the

complacency and dismissal of the military coup threats by the largest opposition force, the Workers Party, and its foremost leader, former president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, politically rehabilitated by the recent annulment of corruption convictions barring him from elections. Lula used his rehabilitation speech at the headquarters of the ABC Metalworkers Union on March 10 to declare he “could not take seriously” the crackdown calls by the Military Club. Making a pro-military profession of faith, he declared, “those who need guns are our Armed Forces, our police, who go into the streets to fight crime with a rusty .38 revolver.” The speech was made against the backdrop of a police strike threat against Bolsonaro, welcomed by the PT with the charge that Bolsonaro had “betrayed” his constituency in the state repressive apparatus.

With staggering hypocrisy, the party has feigned indignation at the persistence of the dictatorial law whose application it oversaw when mass opposition to the party broke out in 2013. The PT is principally responsible for providing a draconian backup in case the hated law was struck down by the judiciary. It vastly expanded the framework for the prosecution of political opposition with the enacting of the anti-terrorism law of 2016, which its governors want to expand to include the torching of buses and blocking of streets, common tactics of demonstrators in response to often deadly police crackdowns.

The PT has one overriding concern: avoiding the eruption of mass opposition to Bolsonaro, which could sweep aside the PT itself, which is politically responsible for his rise and is complicit in his crimes. In the northeastern states where the PT holds power, it has pursued the same homicidal herd immunity policy. All the while, the self-styled opposition is leaving Bolsonaro free to hatch his conspiracies in plain sight.

Every one of these forces is acting in response to the growing restiveness of the working class, which is not willing to accept mass death, impoverishment and repression. In order to carry their struggles forward, workers must break free from the PT-imposed political straitjacket, drawing a balance sheet of the party’s role in preparing the current crisis, and building a section of the International Committee of the Fourth International as a new political leadership.



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