

Brazil's defense minister issues threat over probe into Bolsonaro's handling of COVID-19 pandemic

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The swearing-in of the new commander of the Brazilian army on Tuesday was marked by a threat of military intervention to halt any attempt to hold fascist President Jair Bolsonaro accountable for mass COVID deaths.

The main speech at the ceremony, delivered by the newly sworn-in defense minister, Gen. Walter Braga Netto, warned that the armed forces are ready to act to secure Bolsonaro's reactionary project.

"The moment requires a greater effort at national unity, with a focus on fighting the pandemic and supporting vaccinations. Today, the country needs to be united against any kind of institutional destabilization initiative that alters the balance of power and harms Brazil's prosperity," Braga Netto announced.

The defense minister continued: "Those who believe we are on fertile ground for initiatives that could jeopardize the freedom won by our nation are mistaken. We must respect the democratic rite and the project chosen by the majority of Brazilians to guide the destiny of the country. The society, attentive to these actions, may rest assured that its armed forces are ready to serve the national interests."

These words expose the fraud of the political narrative promoted by the bourgeois media, the Workers Party (PT) and its pseudo-left allies that Bolsonaro's dictatorial moves are nothing more than an "authoritarian delirium," and that his sacking of the entire military high command on March 30 only reinforced the generals' commitment to democracy.

Such political forces point to the growing opposition of sections of the bourgeoisie and the military to the government as a guarantee against Bolsonaro's dictatorial threats.

The launching of a Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry (CPI) that will investigate Bolsonaro's criminal response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which has seriously deepened the crisis of his administration, has only reinforced these arguments.

The pandemic in Brazil is spiraling out of control, with over 3,000 deaths a day. The country has now recorded over 14 million infections and more than 381,000 deaths. The CPI is expected to target the government's deliberate promotion of mass infection of the population, sabotage of vaccinations, and promotion of potentially harmful drugs like chloroquine as quack cures for the deadly virus. The investigation increases the possibility of impeachment proceedings being opened against Bolsonaro.

Tremendous social forces—and not merely the individual actions of the fascist president—are behind the attacks on democracy in Brazil. The explosive growth of the economic and social crisis, and the disaster of the COVID-19 pandemic in the country are accelerating the mortal crisis of bourgeois rule in Brazil.

The devastating effects of the pandemic are compounded by a massive increase in unemployment, wage cuts, and a sharp reduction in the living standards of the Brazilian working class. These conditions, producing unprecedented levels of social inequality in what was already one of the most unequal countries in the world, are rapidly turning Brazil into a powder keg on the verge of exploding. The growth of mass popular opposition is already finding expression in a wave of strikes against workplace deaths and economic attacks suffered by the working class.

Bolsonaro, like the Brazilian ruling class as a whole,

is extremely sensitive to these seismic tremors that threaten the entire edifice of capitalist class rule. While a section of the ruling class fears that keeping Bolsonaro in the presidency will accelerate the explosion of resistance by the working class in the streets and factories, the president is seeking to prove that his imposition of dictatorial measures today is fundamental to preventing the crisis from spinning out of control.

After stating that he has been appealing to the Armed Forces in the face of an imminent social explosion in the country, Bolsonaro declared on Wednesday, April 14: “Brazil is at the limit. People say that I must take action. I am waiting for the people to give me a sign. Because hunger and unemployment are there.”

The “sign” demanded by Bolsonaro was immediately manufactured by his fascist advisers. On social media, his allies started a campaign with the hashtag “I Authorize,” which literally means: “I give a green light for Bolsonaro to install a presidential dictatorship in Brazil.” Based on this slogan, street demonstrations have been called for May 1.

These demonstrations have been endorsed by two federal congresswomen allied to Bolsonaro, Clara Zambelli and Bia Kicis, who defended two parallel demands of the fascistic demonstrations: the reopening of street commerce, and the adoption of printed ballots in Brazil (an argument Bolsonaro has borrowed from Donald Trump to prepare an electoral coup in 2022).

Another pro-Bolsonaro congressman, Otoni de Paula, referring to the opening of the CPI to investigate Bolsonaro, tweeted: “I warn the senators and federal deputies, the PR [President of the Republic, Jair Bolsonaro] will not trade his honor for the chair of the presidency and will only leave it once he is dead. I am warning you, the gentlemen’s plan will unleash a civil war in this country.” He ended his post with the hashtag “I Authorize, President.”

The choice of the date for these demonstrations, designed to coincide with May Day, expresses the long-term goals of the fascistic movement driven by Bolsonaro: to suppress the political movement of the working class through a pseudo-populist movement that backs the financial elite’s most brutal attacks against the working masses.

These demonstrations recall nothing so much as the “March of the Family with God for Freedom,” which

was a series of reactionary middle-class demonstrations in 1964 used as “popular” cover for the military coup engineered by the Brazilian bourgeoisie and US imperialism.

The narrative that the military seized power and installed a dictatorship in Brazil in response to a call by the population to “defend democracy,” a gross and criminal historical falsification, has been aggressively promoted by the Bolsonaro government and the armed forces.

Braga Netto used his first day as defense minister to issue an order of the day stating that the 1964 coup began with a popular movement in the streets and that through it the military guaranteed the “democratic freedoms we enjoy today.” His speech on Tuesday is a further development of this narrative, lauding the military as the guarantor of the “project chosen by the majority of Brazilians.” The implications are unmistakable. Should either the legislature or the judiciary challenge Bolsonaro’s drive toward presidential dictatorship and thereby threaten “instability,” the military may once again be forced to intervene to “defend democracy.”

The dictatorial project being pushed by Bolsonaro, with the aim of imposing upon the working class the most brutal levels of exploitation and the normalization of mass murder, cannot be allowed to triumph. This depends, however, on breaking the political grip of the so-called political opposition to his government within the framework of the bourgeois state, led by the PT and its pseudo-leftist satellites.

Genuine opposition requires the mobilization of a mass movement of the Brazilian working class, organized independently of these parties and the unions, unified with the international working class, and based upon a socialist program for the overthrow of bourgeois rule and the establishment of a workers government.



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