

Workers Party pursues herd immunity policy as Brazil tops 400,000 COVID deaths

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As Brazil tops 400,000 recorded COVID-19 deaths, “opposition” state governors of the Workers Party (PT) and the Maoist Communist Party of Brazil (PCdoB) are implementing policies in tandem with fascistic President Jair Bolsonaro’s reopening of the economy and defense of mass infection.

While the media and state governments are promoting the slightly lower Intensive Care Unit (ICU) occupation rates resulting from partial closures by state governments, the reality is that the rate of infection across Brazil has risen to unprecedented levels for more than a month. During the height of the Manaus surge in January the rolling average peaked at 55,626 cases; it reached 77,129 in March and has yet to fall below the levels of January.

The result is one of the highest coronavirus daily death counts in the world, with more than 2,000 people dying every single day for the past 40 days.

The number of COVID-19 deaths registered in April is the highest since the pandemic started. The death toll reached 200,000 ten months after the first case was registered in the country. However, 76 days later the number reached 300,000 and it only took 36 days for the country to top 400,000 deaths.

Last week, the Finance Ministry announced that the funds solicited by the Health Ministry for the vaccine effort and for the purchase of intubation kits—which include sedatives and muscle relaxants needed for intubation—would be released in smaller installments, citing the “possibility of the acute crisis winding down with the advances in vaccination.”

This effective denial of resources cut the purchase of intubation kits in half, so that stockpiling would now be enough to hold on for 90 days, while the initial estimate was 180. The Finance Ministry announcement came two days after Health Minister Marcelo Queiroga postponed from May to September the end date for the vaccination of the first-priority group, which corresponds to only 37 per cent of the population.

While the government and the mainstream media publicly focus on preparations for the national mass production and new purchases of vaccines, most of which will only become available several months from now, the Health Ministry revealed its real concerns in letters sent to the Finance Ministry

The documents stated that the situation is severe and that

there is “uncertainty” about the demand of hospital units and medical supplies, making a reference to the beginning of April, when ICUs in 24 states were at 80 per cent capacity, while 11 had rates above 95 per cent, which “characterizes a very severe situation.”

Meanwhile, the delays in vaccine imports are compromising the distribution of shots. On Wednesday, a report in *Estado de São Paulo* concluded that cities in at least eight states will not be able to give the second shots in time. There are currently no studies on the effectiveness of taking a single jab, which means that the lives of hundreds of thousands may be at risk. More than 100,000 people will receive their second shots after the 28-day optimal period for the CoronaVac vaccine. In the southern state of Rio Grande do Sul, 223,000 are at risk of losing their window for the second shot after a delay in the arrival of vaccines.

As the vaccination campaign suffers repeated delays, the federal and state governments’ policy of reopening the economy throughout the country means forcing the vast majority of the population to go back into their workplaces and risk getting infected. This murderous campaign is being waged by all sections of the political establishment, including the self-proclaimed “left” state governments.

The delays in the national and local vaccination rollouts haven’t stopped the states from reopening their economies. Last week, Governor Flávio Dino of the PCdoB announced the rolling out of vaccinations for teachers in the state of Maranhão as part of his effort to promote the return to schools in the region, which will inevitably result in a surge of COVID-19 cases among students. On April 9, during the biggest surge in the country yet, Dino announced the reopening of churches with 25 per cent capacity, following a decision by the Bolsonaro-appointed Federal Supreme Court Judge Nunes Marques.

On April 11, Governor Camilo Santana of the PT announced the reopening of the economy in the state of Ceará based on false claims about a “decline” in the state’s deaths and hospitalizations, which meant a stabilization of the numbers at more than 800 deaths per week.

The deadly threat posed by this policy is seen in a report on Thursday that 99.45 per cent of Ceará’s territory, or 184 out of

185 cities in the state, are under an “extremely high risk” of COVID-19 transmission, the highest levels reported in Ceará since January.

The PT governor’s murderous policy was starkly exposed by the explosion of an oxygen cylinder fulfillment plant in Ceará last Saturday, in which six workers were injured, with three being taken to the hospital. A video showed nearby houses with broken windows and people injured. White Martins, the owner company, reported 150 houses damaged.

Although the immediate causes for the explosion are not clear, the criminal response of the self-proclaimed “left” politicians, aligned with Bolsonaro’s drive to let people get sick and die to guarantee profits, has resulted in a surge in demand for oxygen cylinders.

In March, Anvisa, Brazil’s health regulatory agency, announced that, thanks to the loosening of rules and protocols, some companies managed to increase oxygen production and cylinder fulfillment by 200 per cent. Data published by the agency shows that the sale of oxygen cylinders spiked by 47 percent in March, even before the worst period of the pandemic.

White Martins stated during the same month that six states, including Ceará, had been “presenting excessive oxygen consumption” and announced that its plants were starting 24-hours-a-day production. That was before the April surge in deaths throughout the country. One day after the explosion, the company announced that it was transporting oxygen cylinders to Ceará to serve hospitals in the capital and other cities.

The Workers Party and the Communist Party are carrying out these policies while declaring that the defense against Bolsonaro’s preparations for a dictatorship in Brazil is to be found within the same military that imposed a regime of mass repression between 1964 and 1985. Bolsonaro’s herd immunity campaign has been accompanied by repeated calls for using the military to force a reopening of the economy, which would imply the establishment of an openly authoritarian regime.

During a visit to the PT-governed state of Bahia on Monday, just days before the beginning of a Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry (CPI) to investigate the state and federal governments’ handling of the pandemic, the president declared that “we must not allow some pseudo-governors who want to impose a dictatorship using the virus to subdue” the population. He added that “it wasn’t the federal government who made you stay at home or closed stores, which destroyed millions of jobs.”

Amid critical levels of social inequality, widespread reports of hunger and the spread of strikes and protests by app delivery workers, oil workers, metalworkers and transport workers, these so-called “left” parties are focusing all of their efforts on preventing workers’ opposition from getting out of their control.

In the state of Pernambuco, governed by a PSB (Brazilian Socialist Party)/PCdoB coalition, teachers who had led a

courageous strike against the reopening of schools in September, have again entered into struggle, striking for two weeks. The response of the PT-controlled Sintepe (Pernambuco’s Education Workers Union) is to raise the demand, repeated throughout the country, for “the vaccination of all education workers,” while leaving kids to transmit and die from the coronavirus once in-person classes begin.

The bogus campaign by the union is exposed by its own actions. Back in September, the president of the union, Fernando Melo, declared that workers’ dissatisfaction was caused by the “way in which the announcement of the return was made,” not by the lives claimed by the virus. The maneuvers of the union eventually led to the defeat of the strike.

The Sintepe is affiliated to the PT-controlled CUT, which has invited right-wing figures like São Paulo Governor João Doria and Arthur Lira, who was elected chairman of the lower house of Congress with support from Bolsonaro, to participate in this year’s May Day Rally.

A year into the pandemic, all sections of the political establishment are exposed for their criminal indifference to widespread suffering and are actively implementing the herd immunity policy. At the same time, workers are entering into struggle to defend themselves against the policies that are killing their loved ones and destroying their living standards.

Workers must form rank-and-file committees to fight independently and in opposition to all established political parties and trade unions, including the pseudo-left groups that expound radical-sounding phrases against the political establishment while trying to suppress opposition and divert it back behind the PT-led “opposition.” They must demand a lockdown of all non-essential activities, with a guarantee of full income while they shelter at home, while workers in essential activities must have the right to determine safety protocols in consultation with health professionals and specialists.

The International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) is calling for the formation of an International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees to fight against the policies of the capitalist ruling classes across the globe. Committees have already been formed in the US, Europe, Sri Lanka and Australia. We call on workers to participate in the May Day Rally to discuss the fight to build the revolutionary leadership in the working class in Brazil and internationally.



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