

The Brazilian ruling class is unwilling and incapable of mounting any struggle against the deadly pandemic

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6 May 2021

Tomas Castanheira is a leading member of the Socialist Equality Group, which is fighting to build a Brazilian section of the International Committee of the Fourth International. He gave these remarks to the 2021 International May Day Online Rally held by the World Socialist Web Site and the ICFI on May 1.

Greetings from Brazil to this international May Day rally, which represents the development of the only genuine answer of the global working class to the historic crisis we are experiencing.

After more than a year of suffering and privations under the COVID-19 pandemic, the working masses in Brazil are facing an even more savage wave of infections and deaths from the disease. April was the deadliest month of the pandemic in Brazil, as 80,000 Brazilians have died from COVID-19, bringing the terrible death toll in the country to over 400,000.

The COVID-19 conflagration in Latin America's largest country has spread throughout the region at a staggering rate. The P.1 variant of the coronavirus, which together with the rejection of lockdown measures is responsible for the explosion of cases in Brazil, is already becoming dominant throughout the South American continent.

Like Brazil, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela have had their largest death toll in a month since the pandemic began. Argentina and Colombia have broken daily death records in recent weeks, and are experiencing their worst peaks of infections. Chile, despite being significantly more advanced in its vaccination process, is experiencing an unstoppable rise in new cases that is overcrowding its health care system.

The failure to control the pandemic in Brazil exacerbates the dangers not only to the Latin American population, but to all humanity. Dozens of dangerous mutations already identified by scientists are now developing in different parts of the country. Neglecting this situation will predictably result in the generation of strains even more aggressive and

resistant to vaccines.

But the Brazilian ruling class is unwilling and incapable of mounting any struggle against the deadly pandemic. With a tiny percentage of the population vaccinated, and with thousands dying every day from the disease, the coordinated efforts of all bourgeois parties are aimed at the wholesale reopening of economic activities.

The most radical advocate of this social murder policy is Brazil's fascistic president, Jair Bolsonaro. Since the beginning of the pandemic, Bolsonaro has consistently promoted a herd immunity policy, maintaining that the entire population should become infected by the virus and that no measures that impede capitalist profits should be allowed.

To ensure this, Bolsonaro has relied on the immense economic pressures placed on the working masses. The pandemic was accompanied by the explosion of a social crisis that had been brewing over the past several years in Brazil.

Tens of millions of workers suddenly found themselves unemployed. The income from informal labor abruptly disappeared. Wages were cut and the purchasing power of Brazilian families was eroded by a sharp increase in food prices.

The payment of a minimum emergency aid by the government in the first year of the pandemic was calculated to keep workers on a starvation budget that would force them into the infected workplaces.

As the new, overwhelming wave of COVID-19 was hitting Brazil, at the beginning of the year government aid was cut, throwing millions more into poverty and spreading hunger into the homes of Brazilian workers.

Alongside the worsening pandemic and social crisis in Brazil, Bolsonaro has intensified his authoritarian drive, seeking ever more insistently to impose dictatorial measures against the working class and ensure the capitalist policy of herd immunity through repression.

A week ago, Bolsonaro claimed in an interview that his

army is ready to occupy the streets and secure what, in fascist language, he calls the “right to work.” He also claimed that he is systematically preparing with his cabinet a violent response to a coming popular uprising in the streets in response to poverty and hunger.

The fascistic reaction advocated by Bolsonaro, despite the grave dangers it poses to the working class, is an expression not of ruling class strength, but of its weakness. The capitalist oligarchy that Bolsonaro represents is terrified of the growth of an irrepressible working class movement heading toward a clash with the prevailing social order.

In recent years, protests have spread across Latin America in response to the growth of social inequality, which has radically worsened since the pandemic. The mass uprising in the streets of Chile in late 2019 was a harbinger of the political processes that will dominate the region over the next period.

A wave of strikes that is growing in different sections of the Brazilian working class, in opposition to the policy of murder and widespread impoverishment, expresses the developing social opposition.

Over the past few months, educators in São Paulo have maintained a strike against the reopening of the country’s largest school system, which has been joined in recent weeks by teachers in the states of Pernambuco and Minas Gerais. Strikes by bus drivers and other transportation workers have intensified in capital cities across Brazil, and in addition to fighting layoffs and pay cuts, are coming out more and more against workplace infections and deaths.

Outbreaks of infections in Petrobras units have also provoked strikes by oil workers, which have been joined by demonstrations of app drivers and app delivery workers, as well as truck drivers, against the rise in fuel prices and demanding better payments.

These processes objectively raise the need for the unification of the struggles of the working class. They are therefore viewed with extreme nervousness by the unions. This was demonstrated in a letter from the Transport Workers Confederation, demanding governmental funding of the companies to “mitigate the growing general strike movement” in their ranks.

During the pandemic, the unions actively worked to demobilize working class resistance against the murderous capitalist policies. In addition to having advocated for the unsafe reopening of factories, the country’s largest trade union federations, CUT and Força Sindical, merged at the end of the year in a new corporatist formation, IndustriAll Brazil, with the declared goal of defending the competitiveness of Brazilian capitalism and cooperating with big business organizations.

These corrupt trade unions are oriented to defending the

social privileges of the Brazilian billionaires who increased their assets by more than 70 percent during the pandemic. They are linked to the Workers Party and its allies, who today are forcing the criminal reopening of schools and other economic activities in the states they rule.

These political forces, that pose as an opposition to Bolsonaro, give voice to a wing of the bourgeoisie that believes the actions of the fascistic president will cause instability in the country and threaten their profits.

These differences find direct expression on this May Day. While the trade union federations have called for an event that brings together former presidents Lula and Cardoso and several other openly right-wing figures, in the name of forming a reactionary front of bourgeois opposition, Bolsonaro’s supporters are organizing street protests for the total reopening of the economy and the immediate establishment of a presidential dictatorship in Brazil.

The only May Day event that defends the genuine interests of the Brazilian working class and workers all over the world is this one, organized by the International Committee of the Fourth International.

A progressive solution to the crisis in Brazil is impossible without a definitive break with the unions and all forces of the national bourgeoisie.

Fighting the pandemic, social inequality and the threat of dictatorship demands the unification of the struggle of Brazilian workers with their brothers in Latin America and throughout the world through the construction of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees.

And this requires the building of a conscious revolutionary leadership in the working class, a Brazilian section of the ICFI.



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