

Nationwide demonstrations in Brazil after police slaughter 27 in Rio favela raid

Miguel Andrade**14 May 2021**

On Thursday, for the third day in a week, Brazilians took to the streets of Rio de Janeiro and other state capitals to protest against a police raid in the Jacarezinho favela in Rio de Janeiro's working-class northern zone on May 6 which left 28 dead, the largest number for a single police operation since 1989. That was the first year under the current Brazilian Constitution, which ended, on paper, the death squad operations of the 1964-85 US-backed military dictatorship.

The massacre was put at the center of traditional May 13 marches nationwide that commemorate the abolition of slavery in 1888 and protest against social inequality and police violence. Demonstrations demanding the end of police massacres had previously been held in São Paulo on Saturday and on the evening following the intervention in northern Rio, drawing thousands of residents.

The raid was presented by police as an operation to arrest 21 suspects for recruiting child soldiers for drug trafficking. The Jacarezinho favela is considered the main stronghold of Rio's Red Commando drug gang.

Of the 21 suspects, only three were arrested, and another three were killed. Another 24 of the dead had no relation to the case, with nine having no charges against them whatsoever. In addition to the 24 residents, one police officer was killed under still unclear circumstances, allegedly shot in the head at the beginning of the operation, which served as a pretext for the police to unleash an 11-hour reign of terror which washed the streets with blood.

Starting at 6:00 a.m., 250 officers swarmed the favela supported by helicopters and armored personal carriers. Police broke into houses, killing altogether peaceful or surrendering residents in front of family members and children, leaving defaced bodies exposed in the street to intimidate residents. The surviving suspects were forced to carry the bodies into the police APCs, a common form of psychological torture employed by Brazilian police units, as the police sought to destroy evidence of its crimes in the raid.

In the period since 1989, after the ostensible dismantling of state terror operations, the only episode to leave more dead in Rio occurred in 2005 in the cities of Nova Iguaçu and Queimados, in Rio's northern industrial suburbs. The 2005 mass murder was carried out by the so-called militias, the off-

duty police gangs which terrorize working-class areas under the pretext of fighting off Red Commando and other drug-trafficking gangs. These militias enjoy the support of far-right politicians, such as President Jair Bolsonaro who spent 28 years as a congressional deputy until 2018, 13 of them as part of the Workers Party (PT) ruling coalition.

The operation went ahead in open defiance of a Supreme Court ruling banning favela raids unless authorized by the Rio State Attorney's Office (MP-RJ), which was only informed of the operation three hours into the slaughter. The ruling was delivered in June at the request of the Socialist Party (PSB), whose attorneys claimed the police were using the cover of COVID-19 measures to escalate deadly and illegal favela operations.

The court ban has done little to reduce the number of people murdered by the police in Rio de Janeiro. Almost 6,000 Brazilians are killed by police every year. In less than a year since the court ban on raids, over 970 people have been killed by Rio police.

The bloody raid in Jacarezinho is a sharp and tragic exposure of the fascistic views and methods being cultivated by President Bolsonaro within the 27 state-controlled police corps. The COVID-19 pandemic has already inflicted over 430,000 deaths while plunging 60 percent of Brazilians into food insecurity, even as billionaires increased their wealth by 72 percent. Bolsonaro is engaged in a conspiracy on multiple fronts to gain dictatorial powers. State-controlled police forces, acting in defiance of bourgeois-democratic institutions, are among his most faithful constituencies.

Barely a month ago, Bolsonaro coordinated with his closest allies the sacking of the entire Armed Forces command in a bid to align them to his coup plotting. Simultaneously, government-loyalist House members attempted to instigate a mutiny of the Bahia state police against Governor Rui Costa. In March, over a dozen youth were arrested or subpoenaed in relation to violations of "national security," based exclusively on state police monitoring of social media, an action entirely alien to the enforcement of "national security" laws. Police in the capital Brasília also arrested on national security grounds five youth after they briefly unfurled a banner calling Bolsonaro's COVID-19 policy "genocide."

On May Day, police broke into an apartment in Brazil's sixth largest city, Belo Horizonte, and arrested its occupants during a fascistic march of Bolsonaro supporters, based exclusively on the fact that demonstrators had pointed to a resident opposing the march from his balcony. On May 5, Bolsonaro threatened to decree as illegal any social distancing measure and warned, "Do not dare to challenge it."

The blood-soaked intervention in Rio was met with a flurry of praise from President Bolsonaro, Vice President Gen. Hamilton Mourão and Bolsonaro's close ally, Rio Governor Claudio Castro. The alignment with Bolsonaro and the fascistic reasoning behind the raid were proudly expressed by deputies who spoke to the press after it ended. Deputy Felipe Cury railed against any attempt to hold the police accountable for the massacre, declaring, "There are no suspects. They are all criminals, bandits, drug dealers and murderers, because they tried to kill officers."

Another deputy, Rodrigo Oliveira, made clear court orders would mean nothing to the police. He said, "The police will always be present. We will go anywhere. Because of judicial activism, we have been restrained from entering the communities. This makes gangs stronger." After deputy Cury justified the slaughter with the death of an officer at the beginning of the raid, Oliveira extended the threat to all those demanding the most basic democratic rights, telling the press, "I would like to make it very clear that the blood of this officer, who died today for society's sake, is on the hands of these people."

In a fascistic rant, Oliveira explicitly included among those with "blood on their hands" what passes for the "left" in Brazil, particularly the pseudo-left Socialism and Liberty Party (PSOL). PSOL's main leader in Rio, House member Marcelo Freixo, responded to the action with the usual apologies for the state repressive apparatus and calls for the strengthening of intelligence as a means to reduce police lethality. Oliveira mocked such calls, stating that "some pseudo-specialists in security" had "invented the logic that the greater the intelligence and knowledge, the lesser the reaction of gangs." In other words, the police have no intention of hiding their contempt for democratic rights behind the pseudo-left's apologies.

Later, on May 9, Bolsonaro remarked that "the press and the left, using the word 'victim' for drug dealers who steal, kill and destroy families" are actually "offending the people," concluding with an homage to the slain officer. On May 11, Castro delivered a fascistic rant centered on the raid, declaring his mission, as well as that of the police, was to "liberate our people, including from you", referring to PSOL.

For his part, Rio Mayor Eduardo Paes endorsed the fascistic threats of the police deputies, depicting the Supreme Court raid ban as an attack on the legitimacy of the police, which "says the state cannot enforce the law in a given territory."

Paes's immediate alignment with Bolsonaro barely five

months after taking office is at the same time a sharp exposure of the pro-military policies of the self-styled opposition to Bolsonaro in the PT and PSOL. Both parties supported him against Bolsonaro's favored candidate for mayor, millionaire evangelical preacher Marcelo Crivella, depicting Paes as fundamentally opposed to Bolsonaro's fascistic agitation, embodied by Crivella.

It is also an exposure of both parties' programs of opposing Bolsonaro with nationalist and militaristic agitation, promoting the investigative police divisions, calling the "civilian police" a "constitutionalist" stronghold against Bolsonaro, as opposed to the Military Police—a gendarmerie force tasked with street patrols, riot control and which is responsible for the majority of police murders.

For decades, both parties have opposed police violence with the central demand of "demilitarization" of the police, i.e., dissolving the gendarmerie into the civilian police corps tasked with investigations. In order to disorient the opposition to Bolsonaro, the PT and PSOL launched over 150 police candidates in the 2020 mayoral elections. While increasingly turning to the Military Police, both parties defended themselves by claiming the majority of the candidates had been drawn from the nonmilitary, "constitutionalist" branches, into which the Military Police should be dissolved. That was precisely the division which carried the latest, and deadliest ever, favela raid.

Workers and youth opposed to police violence in Brazil must draw the appropriate political conclusions. The Jacarezinho raid is a sharp warning of what is being prepared by the ruling class in anticipation of mass struggles. The operation came on the heels of a nationwide murder rampage by the Colombian police forces, trained by US imperialism in the same "war on drugs" pursued by the Brazilian ruling class against the workers. This "war" was vastly escalated under the 13-year PT rule, setting the stage for the reemergence of the military at the center of political life.

For workers and youth to prepare for the coming struggles, the treacherous subordination of the working class to one or another section of the capitalist state promoted by the PT and PSOL must be rejected, and a truly socialist leadership must be built—a Brazilian section of the International Committee of the Fourth International.



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