

Brazil's Workers Party seeks right-wing electoral alliances as generals warn of “breaking point”

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Last Saturday's massive demonstrations against fascistic President Bolsonaro's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic have deepened the crisis of the Brazilian ruling class, which fears mass social opposition may turn against the entire capitalist order.

Twice in less than a month, hundreds of thousands of Brazilians have taken to the streets with hand-painted signs bearing the names of loved ones lost to COVID and calling Bolsonaro a mass murderer and genocidal. As last Saturday's last demonstration took place, the country surpassed the 500,000 mark for COVID-19 fatalities—the second worst death toll in the world, trailing only the United States, which has a 50 percent larger population. This toll has more than doubled in the first half of 2021 alone, and leading health experts now project that, following the same trend of doubling deaths every six months and amid a slow vaccine rollout that has so far immunized only 10 percent of Brazilians, the total number of dead could reach one million by 2022.

The demonstrations were a sharp, albeit only initial demonstration of the deep anger of workers already expressed in hundreds of strikes against the herd immunity policy of the Brazilian and international ruling classes, particularly among manufacturing, health, transportation and education workers all across the country.

While these strikes and struggles have been suppressed and isolated by the media, the corporatist unions and the congressional opposition led by the Workers Party (PT), the eruption of mass demonstrations has definitely placed Brazil on Latin America's expanding map of massive social unrest now engulfing countries from Paraguay to Colombia. It has also blown to pieces the narrative promoted by Brazil's petty-bourgeois “left”—that the working class and impoverished sections of the middle class are dominated by social conservatism and passive subordination to the fascistic Bolsonaro.

This demoralized and false narrative has never been taken seriously by the government itself, with Bolsonaro consistently declaring that Brazil faces the specter of a mass social revolt like the one that shook Chile in 1919, and that such an eruption

would force him to assume dictatorial powers to “restore order.” Bolsonaro has repeatedly warned his opponents not to “push it” (“esticar a corda”), that is, not to fundamentally oppose him, in order not to “provoke” a coup.

Such warnings have now been taken up by the head of the Supreme Military Court (STM), active-duty Gen. Luis Mattos, who claimed bluntly in an interview with the right-wing *Veja* magazine that “all of those opposing the government” were “pushing it” by attributing to the president “everything that was wrong” and “not letting him rule.” This situation, he warned, would lead to a “breaking point.” The government leader in the Brazilian House, Deputy Ricardo Barros, also declared on June 8 that “we will reach a point where judicial decisions will not be followed,” referring to the defeats suffered by the government in the courts, which Bolsonaro has accused of “overstepping” their authority.

Gen. Mattos made his threats during the same week in which the Army, Navy and Air force legal offices joined Bolsonaro's Solicitor General (AGU) in defending, in the Brazilian Supreme Court, a statute declaring that civilians—including journalists—who “slander” the Armed Forces should be prosecuted in military courts. The law is part of a 1969 military criminal code enacted during the so-called “lead years” of barbaric political repression by the 1964-1985 US-backed military dictatorship.

Popular anger over the half-million avoidable COVID deaths, record levels of unemployment, mass impoverishment and skyrocketing social inequality is deepening divisions within the ruling class over how to deal with the explosive Brazilian social situation. This is highlighted by the increasingly open declarations by senior figures within the political and military establishment recognizing that Bolsonaro may not accept the 2022 presidential election results if he is not re-elected.

Within military circles, these warnings have been ever more vocally expressed by Bolsonaro's former government secretary, retired Gen. Carlos Alberto dos Santos Cruz. Under the former PT governments, Santos Cruz had been a commander of UN “peace-keeping” troops in Haiti and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as well as former PT

President Dilma Rousseff's strategic affairs secretary. He was interviewed by *Veja* magazine and, in unusually blunt terms, compared the Brazilian situation to that of so-called "failed" states where he had commanded UN troops. He charged the Bolsonaro government with "sponsoring fanaticism, spectacle, populism. That is the process behind every authoritarian regime." Ultimately, he declared, "in a divided society, this criminal fanaticism we are living under ends in violence."

Santos Cruz doesn't make his warning based on a principled opposition to social inequality or dictatorship, but out of fear that the Brazilian ruling elite, in continuing its support for Bolsonaro, will sleepwalk into a revolutionary situation, with the outpouring of social opposition getting out of the control of the so-called opposition led by the PT.

Under these conditions, the most pressing task of those factions within the ruling class opposed to Bolsonaro is to chloroform public opinion regarding the objective incompatibility of democratic forms of rule with pervasive explosive levels of social inequality. Those factions aim to single out Bolsonaro and his closest allies as fanatical aberrations, speaking for no one but themselves, and thereby directing social opposition behind traditional forces within the political establishment which are ostensibly opposed to Bolsonaro's "fanaticism."

This operation was accelerated after the unexpected mass outpouring in the protests of May 29. It has at its center the cobbling together of electoral alliances for the 2022 general elections, in which the presidency, the House, a third of the Senate and all state governments and legislatures are at stake.

The electoral maneuvers were kicked off in Rio de Janeiro, Bolsonaro's political base, with the June 11 announcement by Rio Deputy Marcelo Freixo, a star of the pseudo-left Socialism and Liberty Party (PSOL), that he was leaving the party he helped found in 2005 as a PT dissident, and entering the Socialist Party (PSB), the ninth largest party in the Brazilian House. Freixo declared on the same day in a *Veja* interview that the next elections would not be about "left versus right, but civilization against barbarism." He said his switching parties was necessary to attract right-wing figures unwilling to side with the PSOL, while adding that the PSOL would ultimately join a broad coalition with the anti-Bolsonaro right.

Questioned why he didn't rejoin the PT, he declared that joining the PSB was actually the PT's recommendation, due to the popular rejection of the party in Rio after its sponsoring of successive state governments in the state that were brought down by corruption. On the following day, the highlight of Freixo's announcement of his campaign for governor was to name as his chief law enforcement advisor the former minister of Defense and Public Safety in President Michel Temer's right-wing government, Raul Jungmann. Jungmann declared he would collaborate with Freixo in order to "articulate a wide democratic front to free Rio from violence and corruption."

Jungmann's record leaves no doubt about the fraud of

Freixo's claim that his candidacy will represent "civilization against barbarism." As Temer's Public Safety minister, Jungmann was the senior civilian figure behind a year-long and unprecedented military intervention in the state of Rio de Janeiro, which saw the virtual overthrow of civilian authority and the installment of Gen. Walter Braga Netto at the head of Rio's law enforcement. In the first months of the intervention, the PSOL's city councillor Marielle Franco, who was tasked by the city as a human rights ombudsman, was brutally murdered by a death squad. For three years, Freixo and the PSOL have charged that the murder was carried out by Rio's vigilante-style police gangs known as "militias," to which the Bolsonaro family has multiple financial and political ties.

The crime remains unsolved, and Freixo, who had politically sponsored Franco's career, had railed against Jungmann for using her death to strengthen the military intervention. Gen Braga Netto went on to become Bolsonaro's chief of staff, and then defense minister in May 2021, when the president fired the entire military high command in order to consolidate his grip over the armed forces.

As with other senior military officials who joined the "barbaric" Bolsonaro government, Braga Netto has been cast by the PT and PSOL as a "modern" and "constitutionalist" general, despite the explosion of human rights violations during the Army's rule over Rio de Janeiro. Jungmann went on to found and lead Brazil's first integrated civilian-military think tank, CEDESEN, which promotes the illusion that the military is committed to constitutional rule.

The path promoted by the PT and its bourgeois and pseudo-left allies, of subordinating opposition to Bolsonaro to the divisions among the most reactionary architects of Brazil's brutal repressive apparatus, can only lead to catastrophe. The violent swing to the right embodied in Marcelo Freixo's turn to figures like Raul Jungmann expresses the immense objective pressures towards authoritarian rule that have inevitably accompanied the insoluble crisis of Brazilian and world capitalism. The role of such pseudo-left forces is to politically disarm workers and prepare the conditions for a dictatorship, conditions which significant sections of the bourgeoisie and its military command believe are not yet in place.

In order to fight social inequality and dictatorship, workers must break with all of the political forces tied to the capitalist state, including the PT and PSOL, and build a new political leadership, a Brazilian section of the International Committee of the Fourth International.



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