Anti-Bolsonaro protests sweep Brazil as opposition draws up 23 charges of impeachment

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An estimated 800,000 Brazilians were back in the streets this Saturday. For the third time in five weeks there were demonstrations in over 300 cities across the country to oppose the herd immunity policy of Brazil's fascistic President Jair Bolsonaro and the growth of poverty, unemployment and social inequality resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic policies of the country's ruling class.

The country has so far seen the second worst death toll in the world—trailing only the United States—with 525,000 COVID-19 fatalities. Daily deaths remain at 2,000. A slow vaccination rollout, with only 14 percent of the population fully immunized, the reopening of schools and the circulation of the Delta variant mean the country is now facing a third surge of the virus. Experts predict that the death toll may yet double before immunization reaches the bulk of the population.

The wide participation in the demonstrations has thrown the Brazilian ruling class into a deep crisis. This Saturday's marches had been moved up from their original planned date of July 24 as their organizers, led by the Workers Party (PT), scramble to avoid the recent outpouring of opposition provoking an upsurge in the class struggle.

The PT, its affiliated unions and allies in the pseudo-left tried to turn the demonstrations into a means of pressuring House Speaker Arthur Lira, a close ally of Bolsonaro elected with support of PT deputies, into accepting a new "super" impeachment petition presented on Wednesday with the support of extreme right-wing former Bolsonaro supporters.

It lists 23 impeachable offenses committed by Bolsonaro previously included separately in another 120 former petitions thus far ignored by the speaker. Organizers themselves admit that there is nothing new listed in the new petition, and that the most significant new development is the cobbling together of an alliance between the PT, the unions, the pseudo-left and the far-right.

Among the reactionary forces the PT and its allies are attempting to rehabilitate with its impeachment petition against Bolsonaro are dissident wings of the party that elected him, the Social Liberal Party (PSL) represented by the government's former House leader Joice Hasselmann and the Koch brother stooges of the Free Brazil Movement (MBL), which spearheaded the ultra-right demonstrations of 2015 and 2016 against the PT's former president Dilma Rousseff.

The right-wing, pro-capitalist character of the petition is made clear from the outset. The list of 23 crimes starts with "putting at risk the country's neutrality," a message for giant foreign trade lobbies worried about Bolsonaro's offensive against China, which included attempts to ban Huawei from the country's multibillion-dollar 5G market and his enthusiastic promotion of the "Wuhan lab leak" lie.

When the COVID-19 pandemic is referred to, it is mentioned under "crimes against the internal security" of Brazil, an essentially right-wing framework that sees mass death and sickness above all as a threat to the stability of Brazilian capitalism.

Accordingly, the new demonstrations saw banners of the PSL and the PSDB, the traditional party of the Brazilian right, as well as MBL leaders encouraging their supporters to attend. In Rio de Janeiro, state Congress minority leader Marcelo Freixo wore a green-and-yellow t-shirt, proclaiming that demonstrators had to "reclaim the national colors" from the fascists. This was also the motto of the speech given by Guilherme Boulos of the pseudo-left Socialism and Liberty Party (PSOL) in São Paulo, where almost one kilometer of the iconic Paulista Avenue was filled with demonstrators.

Organizers of the "super" impeachment petition admit that its political impulse is drawn from recent revelations of corruption in the negotiations for COVID-19 vaccines, which have left former Bolsonaro loyalists in Congress in disarray.

The charlatan Guilherme Boulos, who is always among the first to articulate a convenient pretext for an alliance with the ultra-right, claimed on the day of the protests that the "corruption cases bring a real possibility of impeachment because they create a crisis in Bolsonaro's own political base." In the same fashion, Workers Party president Gleisi Hoffmann claimed the presence of the PSDB in the demonstrations "meant the movement for the impeachment is growing."

The multimillion-dollar corruption scandal surfaced in late June, when the bulk of the petition had already been written and was being prepared for a ceremonial delivery to the House on July 24.

It was exposed when Deputy Luis Miranda of the ultra-right Democrats (DEM) party told the press on June 23 that he had personally warned the president about pressures being made on his brother, a civil servant who headed the Health Ministry's Imports

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Department, to ignore a number of irregularities in a deal with the makers of the Indian Covaxin vaccine.

Miranda declared that facts he knew would "bring down the Republic." He and his brother were immediately summoned to testify before the Senate's Commission of Inquiry (CPI) into the pandemic, installed at the behest of the opposition. On the day of his testimony, Miranda staged a stunt, wearing a bulletproof vest over his jacket. He accused the government leader in the House, Ricardo Barros, of leading a corruption scheme, and a lobbyist connected to him of offering him six cents on every dollar of the US$320 million deal to stay quiet. He claimed to have warned Bolsonaro about the corruption, and that Bolsonaro told him he knew the schemes were sponsored by Barros. Further charges would be made that other men connected to Barros within the ministry had demanded one dollar in kickbacks for every AstraZeneca dose in another deal.

It is still not clear what motivated Miranda, a former Bolsonaro enthusiast, to expose information he claimed could "bring down the Republic." However, the case reveals the extent of the crisis engulfing the Brazilian ruling class.

Miranda now joins a host of ultra-right figures opposing Bolsonaro who are being offered "democratic" credentials by the PT and the pseudo-left. Among them, there are a number of dissident generals, the most prominent of which is Bolsonaro's former government secretary, Carlos Alberto dos Santos Cruz, who has made repeated warnings that Bolsonaro will follow the example of Donald Trump and provoke violence in an attempt to overturn a possible defeat in the 2022 elections.

The aim of this "broad front" against Bolsonaro is to convince Brazilian workers that the rise of Bolsonaro and the reemergence at the center of political life of the Armed Forces, which imposed a two-decade dictatorship ending in 1985, is a historical aberration. Life can return to normal, they claim, if only Bolsonaro is ousted by his former political sponsors, and they ally themselves with the PT.

The corruption charges have served a larger political goal: that of eclipsing Bolsonaro's "herd immunity" policy, both in the CPI's probe and in the wider public debate. The demands of the protest organizers, for vaccinations, poverty relief schemes and impeachment, accept the 2,000 daily COVID-19 deaths as inevitable, as vaccines are not available. They also propose no attempt to contain the pandemic. As WHO officials and health experts internationally have warned, and recent experience of countries with much higher vaccinations rates, such as Britain, Israel, Chile and the United States, have demonstrated, vaccinations alone cannot control the spread of the virus.

But a direct indictment of Bolsonaro's herd immunity policy would expose the demonstrations' organizers themselves, as all the Socialist, Social-Democratic, Communist and Workers Party governors they support, in collaboration with the unions they control, have pushed teachers, along with healthcare, transport, oil and factory workers, back into unsafe workplaces in state after state, company after company, regardless of infection rates.

The invaluable testimony by a host of leading scientists before the CPI, detailing with a number of complex models how hundreds of thousands of deaths could have been avoided with lockdowns and contact tracing, is discarded by framing the principal charge against Bolsonaro as corruption.

Not only are state governors and mayors let off the hook, but the much more powerful pandemic profiteers who made billions on the stock markets with the "quantitative easing" policies of central banks the world over, and the billionaire stockholders of giant corporations profiting from deadly working conditions are all spared. The corrupt Bolsonaro and his mobster House leader are treated as an "accident of history," as put by numerous PT allies, from the pseudo-left's standard-bearer Marcelo Freixo to former right-wing Speaker Rodrigo Maia.

The CPI's rapporteur, Senator Randolfe Rodrigues, summed up the Covaxin scandal as revealing that Bolsonaro's handling of the pandemic was, ultimately, "not ideological, but the same old corruption." In other words, the herd immunity policy was not an expression of the capitalist crisis and warrants nothing more than a call to the police. "It was not denialism, it was corruption" became one of the main slogans on posters distributed to demonstrators on Saturday.

Brazilian workers must firmly reject the attempt to channel their struggles behind dissident factions of the ruling class. Bolsonaro is responding to the growth of social opposition with the preparation of an electoral coup based on false claims that the Brazilian electoral system is fraudulent. On Thursday, after meeting CIA director Willian Burns in the presidential palace, he claimed that unnamed "foreign powers" were behind plans to destabilize Brazil, an echo of the Cold War pretexts for the CIA-backed coup of 1964.

The only way forward in the fight against the social murder of the pandemic, social inequality and the threat of dictatorship is the revolutionary mobilization of the Brazilian working class independent of every force tied to the capitalist state, including the PT, its pseudo-left allies such as PSOL, and the unions. That task requires the building of a new political leadership, a Brazilian section of the International Committee of the Fourth International.

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