

The mass demonstrations against Bolsonaro and the fight for socialism in Brazil

Socialist Equality Group (Brazil)
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Over the past month, Brazil has seen three days of nationwide demonstrations that have brought hundreds of thousands of people onto the streets against President Jair Bolsonaro's administration and its criminal response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The scale of the demonstrations and the persistence of the protesters express the growing discontent among broad layers of the Brazilian population with the existing social order and point to the urgency of the fight for genuine socialist politics in Brazil.

Alongside similar demonstrations in Paraguay and Colombia in recent months, the protests in Brazil represent the initial development of mass opposition in the streets against the homicidal policies adopted by the ruling classes across the globe in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

They are part of a global wave of working class radicalization, which has seen strikes in Europe and North America that have confronted previously accepted conditions of exploitation and challenged the domination of corporatist unions.

These events are a vindication of the Marxist prognosis of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), which has analyzed the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic as a trigger event that is provoking a revolutionary response by the working class internationally.

The crimes of Bolsonaro and his accomplices

In Brazil, in addition to the more than half a million lives unnecessarily lost to the coronavirus, the capitalist response to the pandemic has worsened the deplorable conditions of life of the working masses, the already grotesque levels of social inequality and the brutality of bourgeois rule in the country.

The homicidal policy of the Brazilian bourgeoisie found in the figure of fascistic President Bolsonaro is its most radical and virulent expression. Bolsonaro insisted that the pandemic should be faced by the ruling class as a *war*, demanding the suspension of the social and democratic rights of the working class.

Consistently following the principle that no effort to save lives should be allowed to conflict with profit interests, Bolsonaro repeatedly attacked policies advanced by scientists and public health experts. He has discouraged the wearing of masks and social distancing, promoted drugs—without any scientific basis—as miracle cures for the disease, encouraged the disobedience of “lockdown” decrees and sabotaged the vaccination campaign in the country.

During the pandemic, Bolsonaro has deepened his systematic efforts to install a military dictatorship in Brazil. He brought military officers into every department of his government, entrusted an active duty general with the coordination of his criminal response to the coronavirus and fought to

draw the Armed Forces into his government's “war on lockdowns” policy.

While Bolsonaro has been the most visible protagonist of the attacks against the Brazilian population over the past year, the entire ruling class and its political superstructure are implicated in these barbaric crimes.

The representatives of the different industrial and commercial associations of the Brazilian bourgeoisie even marched alongside the fascistic president to Brazil's Supreme Court to proclaim “Enough!” and demand the lifting of the meager measures to promote social distancing that were advanced when Brazil had not yet reached 10,000 COVID-19 deaths.

This ruthless order was slavishly obeyed (without even the need for a court order) by all the parties of the bourgeois establishment, from the governors of the Workers Party (PT) to those of the right-wing Brazilian Social Democracy Party (PSDB). All of them promoted the general reopening of the economy and schools, indifferent to the devastating consequences.

The bourgeois state channels for social opposition

Fearing that the growth of social opposition will develop into an open struggle of the working class against the capitalist system, Bolsonaro's rivals within the ruling class are trying to dissipate popular anger by channeling it behind the bourgeois state.

The political forces that called for the recent demonstrations—the PT, its political satellites, and the unions and social movements they control—are actively working to suppress any class content in the political opposition to the Bolsonaro administration.

Their efforts are aimed at creating narrow political limits for the protests, framing them as a form of pressure on the bourgeoisie and its state. According to this political perspective, the action of the masses should serve to legitimize and lend a democratic or even “progressive” veneer to the reactionary political maneuvers and deals being worked out by capitalist interests behind the backs of the people.

The demonstrations were politically subordinated to the forging of a reactionary alliance between the PT and its allies and the most right-wing forces of the Brazilian political establishment. And their agenda was tied to the work of the COVID Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry (CPI) and the schedule for congressional votes on calls for the impeachment of Bolsonaro.

The genuine anger of those who joined the protests over the brutal sacrifice of lives to the coronavirus, the attacks against democracy and the mass impoverishment of the Brazilian population under the Bolsonaro government is thus being driven into a political swamp.

The CPI, to which the demonstrations are being subordinated, is turning

into a cover-up of the crimes committed by the Brazilian state in the furtherance of the capitalist herd immunity policy. The investigation is being focused on the government's "corruption" in the purchase of vaccines, which treats Bolsonaro's "denialism" regarding the pandemic (that is, his refusal to take any action that would interfere with the capitalist economy) as mere window-dressing for his pursuit of private financial interests.

The calls for the impeachment by Bolsonaro's "opposition" within the state are based on a reactionary defense of the stability of bourgeois rule in Brazil against the threats posed by Bolsonaro's provocations.

The overthrow of Bolsonaro based upon these bourgeois methods and political perspective has no progressive content. None of the fundamental problems faced by the working class under the current government would be solved.

Such an outcome, on the contrary, would pave the way for the continuation of the policy of criminal neglect of the COVID-19 pandemic, the deepening of social inequality under capitalism and the ruling class's turn to authoritarian forms of government.

The pseudo-left apologists for bourgeois politics

The attempt to legitimize such a reactionary political outcome requires a division of labor between the political forces committed to the defense of capitalism, in which the pseudo-left organizations, reflecting the interests of privileged layers of the middle class, play a central role.

Political parties and groups originating in Stalinism, Pabloism and its Latin American Morenoite variant, as well as in academic identity politics, are all working to provide a left cover for the demoralized bourgeois opposition to Bolsonaro.

The PSOL, which was founded as a purported left-wing alternative to the dirty bourgeois deals that underpinned the PT governments, has become the leading apologist for an open alliance with the right and the far right, painting these forces as progressive sections of the national bourgeoisie.

This grotesque political alliance took shape in the PSOL's joint filing of a "super" impeachment petition of Bolsonaro together with far-right figures who played dominant roles in the election of the fascistic president in the first place, and then broke with his administration for opportunistic reasons.

In the wake of the signing of this document, PSOL leaders enthusiastically promoted the participation of the right-wing parties in the demonstrations against Bolsonaro. PSOL president Juliano Medeiros attacked any "sectarian voices" that "will say that it is absurd to be on the same platform as the Tucanos [a nickname for the right-wing PSDB]," insisting that "any party that wants the impeachment is welcome."

The Morenoite faction of the PSOL, Resistência, declared that it was necessary to "invite all sections that claim to be in opposition to the government, even segments of the right, to join the demonstrations for ousting Bolsonaro." Seeking to justify this dirty policy with pseudo-radical phraseology, the leader of Resistência, Valerio Arcary, opposed the "tactic of a slow attrition [of Bolsonaro]" with the assertion that "unity in action with ... the bourgeoisie is essential" and "progressive."

Few sections of the pseudo-left present their opportunism as openly as Transição Socialista. The group has (justifiably) claimed to have pioneered the policy of joint action with the far right and the bourgeoisie, now advocated by the entire Brazilian pseudo-left. It promoted the reactionary middle-class protests that served as a "popular" cover for the impeachment of PT President Dilma Rousseff.

The TS once again argues in favor of "unity with every sector ... even

the liberals," based on the demoralized claim that "one must be realistic," and accept that "what is posed as a possibility on the horizon is not a 'general strike.'" In other words, they shamelessly claim that the working class should not be taken as the subject of historical transformation and, instead, one should adapt oneself to what exists, i.e., capitalism.

The reactionary response of these pseudo-left groups to the profound political crisis gripping the Brazilian ruling class is unmasking them as the bitterest enemies of the working class.

For an independent political movement of the working class!

The Brazilian Socialist Equality Group, in solidarity with the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), stands in irreconcilable opposition to the maneuvers of the bourgeoisie and its pseudo-left agents to derail the growing social opposition to Bolsonaro and the entire capitalist system.

We call on the hundreds of thousands of youth and workers who joined the recent protests with the genuine desire to overthrow Bolsonaro's fascistic government and fight for the social and democratic rights of the Brazilian population to turn to the only social force capable of realizing these demands: the working class mobilized independently based upon its own methods of struggle and political program.

Over the past year, the working class has demonstrated its objectively revolutionary social character by responding with a wave of strikes and militant opposition to the capitalist attacks carried out in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The spread of the coronavirus across Europe and North America provoked a wave of wildcat industrial strikes that forced the ruling class to adopt lockdown policies. In Brazil, a similar wave of wildcat strikes broke out in March 2020 among workers in call centers across the country opposing the deadly risks they faced at their workplaces.

The militant response of Brazilian workers was continued in a series of strikes against unsafe conditions in the workplaces and the assault on living standards by health care workers, bus drivers and other transportation workers, app delivery workers, oil workers at Petrobras, auto workers, workers at meat processing plants and those in other industrial sectors. Dozens of teachers strikes have been and continue to be called against the criminal reopening of schools across Brazil.

All these movements have faced the active opposition of the union federations and local trade unions, which acted consciously to isolate and break the strikes, guaranteeing the operation of the corporations and schools at the expense of the mass death of the workers.

The struggle of the Brazilian working class can advance only through a definitive political break with the PT, its pseudo-leftist satellites and the corporatist unions controlled by them, which represent the police forces of capitalism.

Brazilian workers and youth must appeal not to the supposedly "progressive" sections of the bourgeoisie, but to their fellow workers around the world, who face the same dangers of the uncontrolled spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, the massive advance of social inequality and the destruction of democratic forms of government.

With the perspective of unifying the powerful emerging struggles of the global working class and directing them against capitalism, last May Day the ICFI launched a call for the formation of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC).

Brazilian workers should join this initiative, forming rank-and-file committees in every workplace and coordinating their struggles with their colleagues in different industries and across national borders.

As the statement of the ICFI made clear, the IWA-RFC should raise the

banner of socialism, orienting the working class toward the seizure of political power, the expropriation of capitalist banks and corporations and the redirection of the vast fortunes accumulated by the financial and corporate oligarchy to meet the social needs of the world's masses.

The fate of this struggle depends upon the construction of a revolutionary party in the Brazilian working class, a section of the ICFI. Over decades, the ICFI has single-handedly defended the socialist and internationalist principles of Marxism betrayed by Social Democracy, Stalinism and Pabloite revisionism.

Today, the gains of this historic struggle are merging with the objective movement of the working class, opening the path for the construction of the Socialist Equality Parties as the leadership of the working class in struggle for the international socialist revolution.



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