

Bolsonaro charged with mass murder for COVID-19 herd immunity policy in Brazil

Statement of the Socialist Equality Group in Brazil

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The report issued Wednesday by the Brazilian Senate's Commission of Inquiry (CPI) into the response of President Jair Bolsonaro to the COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare a criminal policy responsible for the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Brazilians.

With an official death toll of over 600,000, Brazil is second only to the United States in COVID-19 fatalities. It has the third largest number of cases, at over 20 million, trailing just the US and India. The CPI report proves that such a tragedy was not inevitable but rather the entirely foreseeable consequence of a homicidal strategy.

In its six-month probe, the CPI heard 61 witnesses over the course of 66 hearings. Totaling over 1,100 pages, the report details how the Bolsonaro government pursued a conscious strategy of spreading the virus among the population, ostensibly in the name of achieving an impossible "herd immunity" by means of mass infection.

This strategy was pursued through a variety of measures, including: a relentless minimization of the dangers presented by the virus, described by Bolsonaro early on as a "little flu"; an attack upon minimal public health measures, from social distancing to the use of masks; the official promotion of quack cures leading to hundreds of direct deaths at the hands of hospitals and doctors aligned with the government; the attempt to discredit the vaccines and the sabotage of efforts by state and local authorities to acquire them; the denial of help to local governments, such as in the emblematic case of Manaus; and, finally, the willful neglect of congressionally authorized spending on disease control. On the margins of this barbaric campaign, government officials also found time to pursue overpriced purchases of vaccines, in order to funnel kickbacks into their own pockets.

In addition to Bolsonaro, 65 other individuals and two companies have been indicted for a total of 24 crimes. Bolsonaro is charged with nine of them, which include so-called "common crimes," impeachable offenses and crimes against humanity. The first category involves:

- Epidemic resulting in deaths, by working for the spread of the virus
- Violation of health care guidances, by either ignoring or attacking measures decreed by other government branches, such as the Health Ministry and local governments
- Quackery, for promoting false cures such as hydroxychloroquine
- Incitement of crimes, by relentlessly calling upon his supporters to follow his path in the above mentioned crimes
- Forgery of documents, by authoring and then signing as a member of the independent Budget Court (TCU) a bogus report claiming deaths were being "over-reported" by local authorities
- Mismanagement and omission, for blocking or delaying spending ordered by Congress.

Named as impeachable offenses are violations of constitutional,

individual and social rights to health and economic well-being.

Finally, crimes against humanity are listed as:

- Extermination, for the mass murder of Brazilians
- Persecution of a group or collective, for denying specific needs of vulnerable populations, such as Indigenous Brazilians
- Inhumane conduct, resulting in great suffering or gravely affecting physical or mental health

A number of cabinet members, including former and current health ministers, are also named as responsible for the same crimes. The report also charges Bolsonaro's sons, Eduardo, Flávio and Carlos—a deputy, a senator, and a city councillor—for coordinating a so-called "parallel cabinet" instructing the Health Ministry in secret to promote quack cures and anti-vaccine campaigns. In addition, a number of doctors and business people are charged with conducting barbaric experiments with patients who were treated with quack cures without their knowledge.

The CPI report stands as an indictment of not just Brazil's fascistic president but of heads of state and ruling classes the world over.

Boris Johnson in the UK, Narendra Modi in India, Donald Trump in the United States and countless other national and local authorities should face similar charges of mass murder and crimes against humanity, with guilty verdicts to follow.

These charges would certainly also apply to Trump's successor in the White House, Joe Biden, under whose watch COVID-19 deaths are surpassing those that occurred under Trump, even with hundreds of millions of vaccine shots administered and hundreds of millions more hoarded by the US government. Similarly, Bolsonaro's nominal opponents in local governments in Brazil, Workers Party mayors and governors, have pursued equally homicidal policies.

It would be virtually impossible to name any major bourgeois government that has not committed some or all of these crimes since the outbreak of the pandemic. That is even truer when considering that scientific knowledge of the need for and means of containing and eradicating the virus was widely available.

This was proven by the local and limited success of measures adopted and now abandoned by the governments of Australia and New Zealand, which were able to keep their territories largely free of the virus for long periods, before bowing to the pressure of other imperialist countries to abandon the elimination strategy as part of a wider offensive by US imperialism against China. The Chinese authorities themselves have been largely successful, following scientific advice, in stamping out imported outbreaks, not without facing enormous internal and external economic pressures which they have no means to resolve.

The criminality of capitalist rulers worldwide has been even more

starkly exposed in their attitude towards the emergence of the more contagious and deadly Delta variant, which has defied the dominant strategy to mitigate the spread of the virus through vaccinations alone, under conditions in which the majority of the world's population has yet to receive a single dose.

The unchecked spread of the virus across the globe is not only a threat to humanity at present but also creates the conditions for the emergence of even more virulent strains of the virus, which threaten the advances made through vaccinations and treatments.

This has been demonstrated with sharp clarity in three of the countries which promoted "herd immunity" with greater consistency. The mass spread of the virus in the United Kingdom, Brazil and India gave rise to the Alpha, Gamma and Delta variants, which would succeed each other in becoming the dominant strain across the globe. Before being named as "Gamma," the Brazilian variant was named after the city of Manaus, the epicenter of Bolsonaro's herd immunity strategy, and where a recent study was able to link its emergence precisely to a massive surge in mobility and infection brought about by the reopening of schools.

As stated by the authors of the study, the Gamma variant, which caused two-thirds of COVID-19 deaths in Brazil, was a direct product of public health policies advanced by Bolsonaro and endorsed by the Brazilian ruling class as a whole.

The release of the CPI's draft report does not mean that Bolsonaro will be held accountable for his heinous acts, which were aptly called crimes against humanity. The seriousness of the charges stands in contrast to the actual steps being taken by the political forces leveling them.

The report is expected to gain full CPI approval next week, which will begin a labyrinthine path to any accountability. The report has no legal force and must be forwarded to other authorities, namely the attorney general, in the case of the "common crimes," such as provoking an epidemic; the speaker of the house, in the case of impeachable offenses; and the International Criminal Court in The Hague, in the case of the crimes against humanity.

Both the attorney general and the speaker are firmly aligned with Bolsonaro and are not expected to file charges against him, though they may issue indictments against some lower-ranking officials in order to assuage popular outrage.

Some cabinet members, such as the Defense Minister Gen. Walter Braga Netto, have been charged without even being heard, as the senators feared the Army would react with a coup if he was summoned to testify. One certainty is that the report will not prevent high-ranking members of the military command involved in Bolsonaro's homicidal policies from continuing to exercise free rein.

Pressing charges against Bolsonaro in The Hague, the most serious of the steps announced by the CPI, is a patent fraud. The sponsor of the report, Senator Renan Calheiros, declared that going to The Hague was necessary due to the "inaction" of Brazilian justice. But those responsible for this inaction, House Speaker Arthur Lira and Attorney General Augusto Aras, have been appointed with the support of all the parties involved in drafting the report, including Calheiros' Brazilian Democratic Movement (MDB). Given that they are acting not on the dictates of a Bolsonaro dictatorship but out of common class and political interests, it is certain that The Hague will not hear the case.

The truth is not a single party represented in Brazil's Congress would be able to claim innocence of the crimes charged against Bolsonaro.

No one responsible for the millions of COVID deaths around the

world has been held accountable for a conscious policy that they knew would lead to mass death. In the few places where "investigations" have been held, such as the United Kingdom, the resulting reports are complete frauds, claiming "herd immunity" policies were honest mistakes which followed scientific advice.

More fundamentally, even the political forces which attempted "mitigation" strategies against COVID-19 and refrained from the most psychopathic aspects of Bolsonaro's response subordinated their policies to the imperative of the capitalist profit system to assure the flow of money into the stock markets, and accepted that herd immunity was necessary, even at the price of over 4 million official global deaths so far, a number that is certainly a vast underestimate.

In so doing, they have strengthened the most vicious far-right forces, personified by the fascistic figures of Trump and Bolsonaro. The two are still united in advancing preparations for dictatorship, a process driven by the incompatibility of democratic forms of rule with the obscene growth of social inequality amid such a catastrophe for billions of workers. The cowardice of Brazil's CPI in the face of military figures such as General Braga Netto epitomizes the attitude of the ostensible bourgeois opponents of the far right the world over.

Only the international working class can bring those responsible for the COVID-19 carnage to account. It must carry out this vital task as part of the struggle to put an end to the pandemic and defeat the attempts to make working people pay for its catastrophic consequences through attacks on jobs, wages and social conditions. It is only the working class that has an objective interest in and the ability to carry out the scientifically grounded policies necessary for eliminating the coronavirus.

To advance this struggle, the WSWS and the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) are co-hosting the October 24 webinar "How to end the pandemic." We urge all our supporters and readers to attend the webinar and take up this fight.



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