

Bolsonaro advances coup plots with Brazilian military's support

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11 May 2022

With five months to go before Brazil's presidential elections, an open conspiracy against the democratic process is unfolding before the public's eyes. The incumbent far-right president, Jair Bolsonaro, is systematically advancing his campaign for an electoral coup should he be defeated at the polls, with the increasingly direct collaboration of the military's top brass.

This campaign, based on Bolsonaro's persistent claims that the upcoming elections will be rigged, is now focused on the demand that the armed forces conduct a parallel vote count.

The military's participation in the Election Transparency Commission (CTE), convened by the Superior Electoral Court (TSE), has turned into a platform for an anti-democratic conspiracy. According to Bolsonaro, one of the suggestions made by Gen. Heber Portella, appointed by the Ministry of Defense to integrate the Commission, is that in the "same duct feeding the computers in the secret room, there should be a branch a little to the right so that we have on the side also a computer from the Armed Forces to count the votes in Brazil."

This statement was given by the president at a so-called "Civic Act for Freedom of Expression" with allied MPs on April 27. Under the banner of "freedom of expression," the demonstration saluted the fascist deputy Daniel Silveira (Brazilian Labor Party—PTB), who a week earlier had been sentenced to eight years and nine months in prison by the Supreme Court (STF) for agitating for a coup among the armed forces and demanding the closure of the legislative and judicial branches. Silveira's crimes were pardoned by President Bolsonaro, in an unprecedented act by the current political regime.

Bolsonaro's speech at the "Civic Act" encouraged the calls for pro-coup demonstrations on May 1. With the clear aim of overshadowing the holiday of international working class solidarity with street demonstrations of a fascist character, for the second year in a row, Bolsonaro's far-right supporters held protests on this date demanding the establishment of a presidential dictatorship. Bolsonaro personally visited a demonstration held in Brasilia and appeared by video at one in São Paulo.

Bolsonaro's allegation about the military's demands at the Transparency Commission was preceded by an episode with grave repercussions in the political and military establishment involving Supreme Court (STF) minister Luís Roberto Barroso, who until February presided over the Superior Electoral Court.

In a speech during the webinar "Brazil Summit Europe," hosted by the German Hertie School on April 24, Barroso warned about

the military's growing incursion into Brazilian politics and said that the armed forces "are being oriented to attack the [electoral] process and try to discredit it." He recalled recent episodes, such as the unprecedented dismissal of the defense minister and the uniformed military command, and the tank parade staged during the congressional vote on Bolsonaro's "printed ballots" amendment.

In response, Defense Minister Gen. Paulo Sergio Nogueira de Oliveira issued an intimidating official note characterizing Barroso's speech as a "serious offense" against the military institutions. The note stated that the armed forces "presented collaborative, plausible and feasible proposals" to the CTE "to improve the security and transparency of the electoral system."

The daily *Estado de São Paulo* reported that the armed forces sent 88 inquiries to the TSE in the last eight months about "alleged risks and weaknesses ... in the electoral process." According to the newspaper, the "majority of the questions reproduce the electoral discourse of President Jair Bolsonaro, who has cast doubt on the safety of electronic ballot boxes and kept the Court's own actions under suspicion."

Exacerbating this critical situation, Oliveira sent, on May 5, an official letter to the TSE demanding public disclosure of the suggestions made by the military to the Commission, "given the broad public interest in the topic in question." The current president of the TSE, Edson Fachin, submissively accepted the Defense minister's demand.

Bolsonaro, in turn, responded by doubling down on his coup threats. In a live broadcast, also on May 5, he claimed that the "Armed Forces will not play the role of merely sanctioning the electoral process, participating as spectators," and that his Liberal Party (PL) will conduct a private audit of the elections.

The political crisis facing Brazil today is undeniably the gravest since 1964, the year of the CIA-backed military coup that ousted the elected president, João Goulart. The Brazilian bourgeoisie and its representatives, although aware of it, are absolutely incapable of stopping the rapid decomposition of democracy in the country.

Estado de São Paulo published an editorial last Saturday beseeching the bourgeois establishment: "It is necessary to react to Bolsonaro's crimes." The newspaper declared that "what Jair Bolsonaro has done [in evident and continued fashion] is to incite the Navy, Army and Air Force to feel authorized to act outside their constitutional powers," and that this is not "an abstract or distant danger," as demonstrated by the Defense Minister's

demands to the TSE.

Estado praised the commitment of the Judiciary and the Congress to stop the coup plots, citing as an example the “prudent rejection” of Bolsonaro’s “printed ballot” amendment. But the remarkable fact was, in reality, that the proposal was backed by a majority of Congress, and failed to be approved only because a constitutional amendment requires 60 percent of parliamentary votes.

In response to the same movement in preparation for an electoral coup, the TSE, presided over by Barroso, convened the extraordinary Election Transparency Commission with the participation of the military, and even invited Bolsonaro’s former defense minister, Gen. Fernando Azevedo e Silva, to assume the post of general director of the court. The occupation of the electoral system by the military was not characterized in the corporate media as an unacceptable capitulation to the anti-democratic pressures, but rather as a brilliant maneuver by Barroso to neutralize Bolsonaro’s political mobilization of the armed forces. An article by Eliane Catanhêde in *Estado*, for example, claimed that “Appointing a general to the TSE reduces attacks on elections and threats of a Trump-style coup,” calling the decision a “masterstroke.”

Only a year ago, during the crisis opened up by the dismissal of the military command, the press boasted that the appointment of General Oliveira to the command of the Army represented a defeat for Bolsonaro’s campaign to politicize the armed forces. In a typical commentary, Getulio Vargas Foundation professor Rafael Alcadiapani told Reuters that Oliveira was supposedly “even stricter than Pujol [his predecessor] with respect to the separation between the Armed Forces and politics and shows that the president will not have a puppet at his disposal in the Army.” He is referring to the same man who today, promoted to defense minister, leads the attacks on the democratic regime hand-in-hand with Bolsonaro.

Every measure taken by the ruling class to, in theory, contain Bolsonaro’s coup maneuvers has had the effect of deepening the contradictions of the rotten bourgeois political regime and opening new avenues for the advance toward dictatorship.

With the support of the Workers Party (PT) and its pseudo-left satellites, the liberal bourgeoisie has mouthed the mantra that the “constitutional commitment” of the armed forces is the greatest counterweight to the “authoritarian fantasies” of the fascist president. Those illusions have been completely shattered.

Rather than a product of Bolsonaro’s reactionary ravings, the decomposition of democracy in Brazil grows directly out of the objective crisis of the world capitalist system. The dictatorial threats in Brazil and around the world are driven by the same conditions that gave rise to the social murder policy of the ruling class in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the explosion of global social inequality, and the imperialist powers’ turn to nuclear world war.

“The excessively high tension of the international struggle and the class struggle results in the short circuit of the dictatorship, blowing out the fuses of democracy one after the other,” wrote Leon Trotsky in 1929. He continued: “The process began on the periphery of Europe, in the most backward countries, the weakest

links in the capitalist chain. But it is advancing steadily. What is called the crisis of parliamentarism is the political expression of the crisis in the entire system of bourgeois society. Democracy stands or falls with capitalism. By defending a democracy which has outlived itself, Social Democracy drives social development into the blind alley of fascism.”

An analogous process is taking place today. This time, the United States, the heart of world imperialism, is a focus of the global short-circuiting of democratic rule. The coup orchestrated by Donald Trump on January 6, 2021, is being followed by a devastating wave of attacks on democratic rights under Biden’s Democratic administration, which prepares a dictatorship domestically and ruthless war abroad.

Trump’s electoral coup serves as an open model for Bolsonaro in Brazil. But there are also immense similarities in the attitude of Brazilian bourgeois parties, especially the PT, to the spineless response of the Democratic Party, which was more concerned with the risk of a social explosion than with the threat of fascism. Biden entrusted the military with the task of preventing the coup openly announced by Trump and called for collaboration with his “Republican colleagues” to govern.

Brazil’s former president Lula, of the PT, while dealing with the coup threats by means of backroom dialogue with the military, is running against Bolsonaro under the banner of “bringing the divergent together” to save democracy. This means a compromise to make the most right-wing government in the PT’s history. As Trotsky said, this path can only lead to the dead end of fascism.

The military has already announced that it is preparing for a US-style “Capitol scenario” in the coming Brazilian elections. Their attitude toward a coup—whether they will support Bolsonaro as dictator, stand against him, or take power themselves in the name of preserving political stability—remains an open question.

A consistent response to the dictatorial threats can only come from the independent political mobilization of the working class. Across the globe, the explosive conditions of the world capitalist crisis are driving workers to mass strikes and protests. The unification of this powerful movement under the banner of world socialist revolution is the necessary basis for fighting war, social inequality, and the pandemic in Brazil and around the world. That is the perspective fought for by the Socialist Equality Group in Brazil (GSI) and the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI).



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