# On eve of Brazil's election, Workers Party covers up collaboration in Bolsonaro's COVID-19 "herd immunity" policy

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With little more than a week before the October 2 presidential election in Brazil, the Workers Party (PT) and its candidate, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, are trying to hide the rotten state of Brazilian bourgeois democracy. This includes threats by fascistic President Jair Bolsonaro to repeat the January 6 US Capitol scenario and carry out an electoral coup if he is not named the winner. As is the case in all bourgeois elections, the total cover-up of the real political, economic and social situation, as well as its causes, adds up to numerous false promises.

The central theme of the electoral campaign of the PT and Lula is that they will "reconstruct and transform" Brazil if elected on the basis of a nationalist and pro-corporate program. It hopes this can restore its role as the preferred party of rule of the national bourgeoisie, and at the same time bring it international support.

One key element of its ever-diminishing set of promises to workers is that the party will take an opposite, scientifically guided approach to public health, strengthening the national Unified Health System (SUS), and particularly pandemic response. The party feigns horror at Bolsonaro's homicidal "herd immunity" policy, which led to almost 700,000 official COVID-19 deaths in the country. Calling Bolsonaro's response to the COVID-19 pandemic "genocidal" has become a staple of TV ads and rallies during the electoral campaign.

However, any pretense that the PT has represented in the past three years or will represent in the future an alternative to Bolsonaro's barbaric pandemic policy is exposed by its own statements on the issue.

In election propaganda about the Bolsonaro government's pandemic policy, the PT says, "Bolsonaro mocked the pandemic that killed 670,000 Brazilians. 400,000 lives could have been saved." From the outset, the PT considers that 270,000 deaths are acceptable and were inevitable. It does not even remotely make reference to the scientifically proven possibility of COVID-19 being eliminated. If Brazil had followed a Zero COVID policy such as the one implemented in China, less than 800 deaths would have been recorded throughout the pandemic.

Of the 121 paragraphs of the campaign platform of the electoral slate headed by the PT, only one deals with the COVID-19 pandemic: "It is urgent ... to attend to people with Long COVID and resume the recognized national vaccination program." This represents a total downplaying of the danger still posed by the pandemic in Brazil, a disregard of the possibility that the situation may worsen with new variants, and the defense of the unscientific claim that only vaccination can contain the pandemic. It expresses the class alignment of the PT and the other parties in its coalition—including the pseudo-left Socialism and Freedom Party (PSOL)—with the policy of the world ruling elite, led by the Biden administration in the US, to declare COVID-19 "endemic," without any basis in scientific facts, but only serving corporate needs.

**The PT unions and governors advance a fraudulent opposition to Bolsonaro**

The PT's main concern during the COVID-19 pandemic was to further boost its ties with sectors of Brazil's ruling class fearful that Bolsonaro's cruel and undisguised offensive against workers' health and living standards threatened the country with a social explosion, bringing into question the very continuity of capitalism.

Any pretense that the fight against the pandemic in the Northeastern states the PT controlled would be guided by science, with the closing of schools and businesses in general, was exposed less than a year later. The coordinator of the region's scientific committee, longtime PT supporter and renowned neuroscientist Miguel Nicolelis, was forced to quit his position just before the second wave exploded in Brazil in early March 2021.

Contrary to the press propaganda that people were "tired" of and opposed social isolation measures, they were crucial for the party's electoral gains in the local November 2020 elections. But as Nicolelis explained in an interview with the WSWS in October 2021: "In the first wave... we managed to flatten the curve with social isolation and some regional lockdowns, especially in the Northeast ... But after the electoral calendar was settled [in November 2020], and that's what apparently they [the Northeast governors] were interested in, they stopped. Because in the second wave they did nothing."

At the height of the original Omicron wave, Nicolelis again exposed the party's policy in another interview with the WSWS. He said, "The PT governors themselves, who I know very well because I worked with them, stopped doing what had to be done a long time ago. So, who is progressive in this story? I have seen conduct of so-called progressive people that is very similar to Bolsonaro's. They just had the veneer and the stamp of progressives."

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Instrumental in the PT's fraudulent opposition to Bolsonaro was the claim that vaccines alone could stop the virus. In early March 2021, when the second wave exploded in Brazil after numerous alerts that experts had been issuing since the beginning of that year. The PT's Northeastern governors announced a so-called "national pact" against the pandemic, which was reduced to accelerating the purchase of vaccines and ineffective measures such as curbs on the sale of alcohol.

The PT took the lead in the "herd immunity" policy when in August 2021, as deaths were in a slight decline from horrific months-long levels of over 1,000 a day, state governors imposed the largest reopening of schools in Brazil since the pandemic began, implying that the previous mass levels of infection could contain new emergences of the virus. In the state of Bahia, PT governor Rui Costa cut the wages of teachers on strike against the reopening of schools and threatened to fire them.

By October 2021, after overturning social distancing in classrooms, three of the four PT state governors had made student presence mandatory in unsafe schools. The presence of students in schools was a precondition for the general reopening of the economy. By October, the PT-ruled states had also removed virtually all restrictions on business.

Mask mandates in schools were abandoned in all Brazilian states in April of this year after the Omicron BA.1 wave. The presence of unprotected children in precarious schools found the perfect environment for the spread of a range of infectious diseases, such as acute bronchiolitis, which filled pediatric ICUs in several states and led to dozens of infant and child deaths. Between January and May of this year, nearly 300 children under the age of four died, infected by the so-called "mild" Omicron BA.1, twice as many as in the same period last year. In May, in the beginning of the wave driven by Omicron BA.4/5, more than half of the cases of COVID in the PT-ruled Ceará state occurred in children under nine.

When massive youth-led demonstrations erupted against the herd immunity policy from May 29, 2021, the PT, PSOL and all other parties of the pseudo-left, horrified by the possibility of being overrun by them, redoubled their efforts to channel opposition behind a "super" petition for the impeachment of Bolsonaro. This was backed by representatives of the Brazilian right and far right, many of them former allies of Bolsonaro who were trying to distance themselves from the fascistic president.

The PT and the PSOL backed integration with the hated right-wing Bolsonaro dissidents, claiming, in the words of PSOL's president Juliano Medeiros, that "for the removal of the president to proceed, it is necessary that part of the center-right breaks with the government." Soon, all demonstrations were demobilized based on vain hopes that the Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry in the Brazilian Senate investigating the Bolsonaro government's actions during the pandemic would provide the "final push" to the impeachment, which never came.

On the other hand, the CUT, Brazil's largest union federation, controlled by the PT, played a central role in the "herd immunity" policy by holding regular meetings with governors, such as São Paulo's João Doria, to ensure that factories would not close, and advancing the change of factory shifts to allow them to operate despite fraudulent "lockdowns."

Also instrumental was the PT-controlled São Paulo teachers' union, APEOES, which criminally sabotaged a strike against the reopening of schools at the beginning of the 2021 school year, just one month before the second wave exploded in March.

The local reproduction of Bolsonaro's "herd immunity" policy earned the PT an increase in its electoral coalition from three parties in 2018 to nine parties today, the largest in the country. It includes those that until recently the PT denounced as "putchists" for having supported the fraudulent impeachment of former PT President Dilma Rousseff, first and foremost the four-time São Paulo governor Geraldo Alckmin.

**The case for the global elimination of COVID-19 and the struggle for socialism**

Since the beginning, the International Committee of the Fourth International has insisted that the COVID-19 pandemic was not only a health problem, but predominantly a political one. The response to it has been determined by class interests.

Developments over the past three years have shown that there are no qualitative differences between the Bolsonaro government and the PT, the pseudo-left, and the unions regarding the pandemic. By prioritizing corporate profit interests, they have been instrumental in keeping businesses and schools open throughout the pandemic, either by eliminating the few mitigation measures and creating the illusion that the pandemic is over, or by blocking the development of social opposition.

The only scientifically based response to the pandemic that represents the interests of workers is the global elimination of COVID-19. This requires a conscious break with the PT, the pseudo-left and the unions, and the development of a struggle against the source of the world ruling elite's herd immunity policy, the capitalist system. The growing movement of the Brazilian and international working class must raise this demand to put an end to the pandemic as part of a broader struggle for international socialism.

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