

Congressional inquiry into Brazil's January 8 coup attempt marked by secrecy and cover-up for the military

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Two months after the convening of the Joint Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry (CPMI) to investigate the January 8, 2023, coup attempt by supporters of Brazil's fascistic former president Jair Bolsonaro, its real political content has become clear: the CPMI, supposedly the country's highest democratic investigative body into that conspiracy, is hostage to the Bolsonaro conspirators themselves and to their protectors in the judicial, military and police apparatus.

The anti-democratic character with which the dominant factions of the Brazilian ruling class are dealing with the coup plot is exposed in the CPMI leadership's acceptance that the data used to prosecute and arrest key authorities involved in the coup plot be accessed under draconian rules in a "secret room" in the Senate, hidden from the population.

The use of the "secret room" was an imposition of the all-powerful Supreme Court (STF) justice, Alexandre de Moraes, who conducts, without any supervision and with the cowardly connivance of the elected authorities, a secret inquiry upon which all relevant judicial measures against key figures of *Bolsonarismo* are based.

Committed to securing capitalist stability at any cost and unable and unwilling to make any appeal to the working class, the Workers Party government of President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva of the Workers Party (PT) endorses any measure taken by Moraes in his unchecked inquiry. It operates in the vain hope of neutralizing Bolsonaro, while absolving the rotten political system that created him, of which the PT itself is a crucial part.

According to Moraes' demands, in order to access the plethora of evidence of the coup plot already collected by the police and intelligence apparatus under his control, senators and deputies who make up the CPMI will have to access a safe room in the basement of the Senate without any instruments other than paper and pen, leaving their cell phones out. All their activity will be monitored remotely—the room is watched by cameras, and computers with access to

documents will monitor who accessed what material and for how long. Members of Congress will be able to appoint only one aide each to assist them in the task.

Such restrictive procedures prevent any serious analysis of the documentation. Justice Moraes, with an army of experts and cops at his disposal, remains the only one to have a complete picture of the conspiracy. Far from using any parliamentary procedure to assert the authority of elected representatives to investigate the highest of crimes against Brazil's limited democracy which they all claim to defend, senators and deputies have slavishly accepted the impositions and are so far waiting for the data requested from Moraes to be shared.

The CPMI's request to access the data from Moraes' secret investigation is aimed at resolving a contradiction that has become apparent in the first two months of the body's work—its lack of autonomy from the military, from the Bolsonaro loyalists themselves, who make up a fifth of Congress and are represented on the commission, and from the Lula government. The PT's sole aim is to restore public confidence in the security forces implicated in the coup and to appease its more authoritarian elements with the promise of billions of reais in arms purchases and investments in the national arms industry, from which the armed forces extract fortunes in royalties.

As a result, the CPMI has so far followed in the footsteps of the Moraes-led investigation, seeking testimony from figures already publicly indicted by the minister, and thus seen as easy targets. Despite a long list of already approved summonses that include powerful figures in the conspiracy, such as the ultra-reactionary former head of Brazilian intelligence under Bolsonaro, Gen. Augusto Heleno, the main testimony so far has been that of Bolsonaro's former aide-de-camp, Col. Mauro Cid. Cid was caught in possession of messages exposing a plan to overturn the power of the electoral authorities and impose a pro-Bolsonaro provisional government.

The example of Cid is emblematic of the contradictions that run through the CPMI. Cid is being held in pre-trial detention by order of Moraes, but when he attended the CPMI hearing he wore his full dress Army uniform and decorations. As was immediately disclosed, the direction for Cid to wear military attire was given directly by the Army high command, in a clear sign of intimidation against the civilian authorities. The former vice-president under Bolsonaro and current senator, Gen. Hamilton Mourão, reinforced the military's message by posting on Twitter on the day of the hearing that "for us SOLDIERS, loyalty and camaraderie are NON-NEGOTIABLE values", that is, above loyalty to the civilian constitution.

During his few weeks in prison, Cid has received no fewer than 73 visits, including from the first army commander appointed by Lula for his third term—and sacked a month later—Gen. Júlio César Arruda.

Cid's "testimony" to the CPMI consisted of remaining silent for seven hours. To cover up their own cowardice, pro-government deputies filled the evening papers with reactionary hysteria about Cid's "abuse of the right to silence," which did nothing to change the fact that the military remains untouched by the investigation. On the same day, Lula's own Defense minister defended Cid's wearing his uniform and denied the involvement of high-ranking military personnel in the coup plot.

The government's cowardice has been a hallmark of the CPMI ever since its preparation. Lula's administration has never hidden its preference for the entire investigation to be left to Moraes; that would keep it behind closed doors and allow negotiations to target convenient scapegoats while guarding the political system.

The political calculations made by the Brazilian ruling class about the benefits of a Bolsonaro dictatorship were so open and broad that a real investigation of the coup plot would amount to an indictment of the entire political order. At the top of the huge queue of indicted would be the PT government's allies in Congress.

Until six months ago, the PT accused its current allies of being "accomplices to genocide" for blocking the investigation of Bolsonaro for promoting the maximum possible contamination of the Brazilian population since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

But, despite such maneuvers, the deep ramifications of the conspiracy in the state apparatus continue to emerge every day. A lengthy June 20 article in the British *Financial Times* chronicled an unprecedented series of behind-the-scenes visits to Brazil by senior US diplomatic, intelligence and military officials in 2021 and 2022. Based on the testimony of key participants, it reports on several discussions aimed at convincing the Brazilian military not to support a coup led

by Bolsonaro.

The article revealed that the then commander of the Brazilian Navy, Adm. Almir Garnier Santos, was the "most difficult" to dissuade. It also names, according to former top State Department official Tom Shannon, Bolsonaro's vice president, General Mourão, as one of the Brazilian officials approached at a July 2022 business event in New York to address the coup threat.

The accounts given by senior US foreign policy officials—endorsed by several other reports—have so far been completely ignored by all investigations into the coup attempt. There is no sign of a call by the CPMI for clarification from General Mourão, Admiral Garnier, or any diplomatic official from Brazil or the US.

At the same time, the *FT's* article exposes the enormous imperialist pressures on the Lula government. Despite perfunctory claims that "It's Brazilian institutions that really made sure that the elections took place," the message from US officials is that Lula is their hostage. As Shannon declares, Washington sees Lula's questioning of its war policies against Russia and China as simply unacceptable: "It's as if he doesn't know or doesn't want to acknowledge what we did."

US imperialism, the chief sponsor of coups and bloody dictatorships in Latin America for over a century, wants to make clear that whatever the tactical considerations behind its opposition to a coup by Bolsonaro, the only thing standing in the way of Washington supporting the PT government's overthrow are calculations based upon political expedience.

Such threats are in themselves an additional factor of instability, exposing the PT's fragility not only in the face of its enemies on the far right, but more fundamentally in confronting the Brazilian working class. It is only the working class, independently mobilized on the basis of a socialist and internationalist perspective—and not the police state being built around the all-powerful Justice Moraes—that will bury once and for all the fascist and imperialist threat to Brazil by attacking its root cause: the rotten international capitalist system.



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