

# Arrest of masterminds in Marielle Franco murder points to rot of bourgeois democracy in Brazil

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On March 24, Brazil's Federal Police (PF) arrested the masterminds behind the 2018 murder of Rio de Janeiro councilwoman Marielle Franco of the pseudo-left Socialism and Freedom Party (PSOL). According to the PF, the masterminds of the crime are the brothers Chiquinho ("Little Francisco") and Domingos Brazão, well-known political figures in Rio de Janeiro.

Domingos Brazão was a city councilor, state deputy between 1999 and 2015 and is currently an advisor to the Rio de Janeiro State Court of Auditors. Before being elected federal deputy in 2018, Chiquinho Brazão was a city councilor in Rio de Janeiro between 2005 and 2017, serving alongside Marielle Franco. For most of their political careers, they were members of the Brazilian Democratic Movement (MDB), the officially sanctioned opposition party to the US-backed Brazilian military dictatorship (1964-1985) that led the so-called "democratic transition" in Brazil.

Along with the Brazão brothers, the PF arrested the former head of Rio de Janeiro's civil police, Rivaldo Barbosa, who is accused of planning the crime and obstructing investigations. He was appointed to the post the day before Marielle Franco's murder.

In all, the investigations into the Marielle case had five civil police delegates, some of whom are also suspected of having obstructed the investigations. In March of last year, Flávio Dino, then justice minister in the government of President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (Workers Party – PT), requested that Federal Police investigate Marielle's murder. The arrests took place after the Federal Supreme Court approved a plea bargain by Ronnie Lessa, a former Military Police officer who killed Marielle Franco and has been imprisoned since 2019.

Marielle Franco's death six years ago was immediately linked to the militias, paramilitary forces in Rio de Janeiro, which have multiple connections to the Military Police and numerous politicians, such as the Brazão brothers, and whose origins go back to the death squads that were unleashed against opponents of the military dictatorship. Offering gas, internet, electricity, and even social services in exchange for fees from residents, today the militias control almost 60 percent of the

area of Rio de Janeiro, particularly in the western and northern zones of the city, where 33 percent of the population lives.

The information that Marielle Franco was an obstacle to the Brazão brothers' interests, including acting with the population of the region against a bill that would have blocked their exploiting land that had been environmentally protected, was obtained by the two members of the militia controlled by the Brazão brothers who were infiltrated into the PSOL from the end of 2016. In monitoring the actions of Marielle and other PSOL politicians in the region, the Federal Police indicated that the infiltrators' actions helped prepare the assassination.

Marielle's work against the militias, as well as her denunciations of brutal police violence in Rio de Janeiro, began in the mid-2000s. Before being elected councilor in the 2016 election, Marielle Franco had been a parliamentary aide to Marcelo Freixo, who was a state deputy in Rio de Janeiro for PSOL between 2007 and 2018. In 2007 and 2008, he chaired a Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry (CPI) that investigated the actions of militias in Rio de Janeiro and was coordinated by Marielle Franco.

Amid these revelations, one of the most explosive elements of the Federal Police report raised suspicions about the commander of the unprecedented federal intervention in public security in Rio de Janeiro between February 2018 and January 2019, Gen. Walter Souza Braga Netto. Significantly, he would occupy two ministries in the government of the fascistic ex-president Jair Bolsonaro and was his candidate for vice-president in the 2022 election. Bolsonaro and his sons' close relations with the Military Police, one of their most critical political bases, linked to militias in Rio de Janeiro are notorious.

In control of the state's public security, including at the time of the assassination of Marielle Franco, Braga Netto changed the entire top management of the state's public security, appointing delegate Rivaldo Barbosa as head of the civil police. This happened even after he was alerted by the state's intelligence sub-secretariat that Barbosa had connections with the militias.

The maneuvers carried out by Barbosa to obstruct the

investigation and bring the case to a premature conclusion have put the widespread corruption of the military and civil police and the advanced degree of the militias' relationship with state institutions in the corporate media spotlight over the last two weeks. The real extent of Braga Netto's and other military personnel's connections with the militias is unclear, at least publicly.

However, what has been exposed by the episode is the advanced level of rot in bourgeois democracy in Brazil and the return of the military to the center of politics in Brazil decades after the end of the military dictatorship.

The revelations in the Marielle case were released amid revelations about the participation of multiple generals from the Bolsonaro government in the January 8, 2023 coup attempt. General Braga Netto himself was one of the main organizers of the abortive coup, pressing for the support and participation of other high-ranking officials in the Armed Forces and helping to organize the infiltration of military personnel in the attack on the headquarters of the three powers in Brasília.

The arrest of those responsible for the murder of Marielle Franco made the PT and PSOL double their bets on a "broad front" against the militias in Rio de Janeiro. In the same way they did throughout the Bolsonaro government, paralyzing all political opposition to the fascist president by channeling it into the elections and the institutions of the bourgeois state that opened the way for the coup attempt, their main political goal is to prevent workers and youth from drawing the necessary conclusions about the rottenness of bourgeois democracy in Brazil.

This policy has been defended mainly by Marcelo Freixo, who in 2022 left the PSOL for the Brazilian Socialist Party (PSB) to expand his electoral alliances with bourgeois politicians in the fight against *bolsonarismo*. Today he is pursuing the same tactics in the fight against the militias. Last year, he joined the PT and is now president of the state-run Brazilian Tourist Board (Embratur) under the Lula government.

In an interview with the *Sem Censura* show on March 25, he answered the question "Does Rio de Janeiro have a solution?" declaring: "The solution is in politics, in institutions... There is a way out, there is a [municipal] election now in 2024, there is a [state] election in 2026, let this episode [the exposure of those behind Marielle's murder] serve as a lesson, that makes certain figures understand that you can form an alliance, you must form an alliance, but you cannot form an alliance with crime." He also defended a "pact" between right and left involving "the judiciary, the artistic class, the political class, the population" to "save Rio de Janeiro."

Likewise, PSOL launched a manifesto on March 29 entitled "There is no game with the militia." According to it, its goal is "to bring together everyone who knows that there is no justice without rights and that there is no game with the militia." Stating that "it is necessary to face the political structure that made Marielle's murder possible," it defends "refounding Rio

on democratic and socially just foundations."

The failure of this policy, pursued both nationally and in Rio de Janeiro in the name of fighting Bolsonaro and the militias, has been repeatedly exposed by the PT and PSOL. Today, the PT's main ally in Rio de Janeiro is the city's mayor, Eduardo Paes, of the right-wing Social Democratic Party (PSD), whose origins date back to the ruling party of the military dictatorship. It took Paes almost a week to speak out about the fact that Chiquinho Brazão had been one of the secretaries in his government until February, after the content of Lessa's accusation was made public.

PSOL, meanwhile, has offered a left-wing cover to the PT and pressured it to break with Paes. According to the party's federal deputy Tarcísio Motta, Paes "represents the same political group that has been promoting and employing the militia for years." This, however, did not prevent PSOL from supporting Paes in 2020 against the candidate supported by Bolsonaro in the municipal election, and will undoubtedly not prevent it from doing the same this year.

As loyal defenders of capitalism in Brazil, the PT and PSOL are unable to explain Franco's assassination and the situation in Rio de Janeiro, claiming instead that the healthy path of Brazilian democracy has merely been diverted by the election of Bolsonaro and the action of militias, both of which could be fought by a "broad front." The reality is that the source of fascist politics and violence lies in the very development of capitalism in Brazil, marked by an intense international economic crisis. They are "manifestations of the worldwide decline of bourgeois democracy under the weight of the contradictions of world capitalism, chiefly the unprecedented growth of social inequality and the growing inter-imperialist conflicts," as the WSWs explained in 2019.

In recent years, numerous demonstrations and strikes have broken out in Brazil against multiple attacks on social and democratic rights, including massive spontaneous protests against the murder of Marielle Franco and police violence in 2018 and subsequent years. In all these cases, the PT and PSOL did everything to stifle and subordinate this movement to bourgeois politics.

The struggle of the working class in defense of social and democratic rights and against preparations for dictatorship in Brazil can only be carried forward with a systematic exposure of the policies of the PT, PSOL, and the pseudo-left and with the construction of an international movement of the working class against the capitalist system, the cause of the breakdown of democracy in the world.



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