

Police massacre in Rio de Janeiro signals generalization of capitalist violence and barbarism

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The scene of an endless row of corpses, laid out by grieving family members on the asphalt of the Penha favela (shantytown) in Rio de Janeiro, shocked Brazil and the world last week.

The largest police massacre in the country's history, carried out in the early hours of October 28, left 117 civilians dead according to the official count. The state Public Defender's Office disputes these numbers, having identified more than 130 victims.

Conducted under the pretext of arresting 100 members of Comando Vermelho, one of the country's main drug-trafficking organizations, Operation Containment was waged as an operation of war in the hills inhabited by the poor population of Brazil's second-largest metropolis. Some 2,500 police officers, 32 armored vehicles, dozens of demolition vehicles, helicopters and drones were deployed.

Having executed only 20 arrest warrants, the "unpredicted" assassination of more than 100 people was celebrated by Rio de Janeiro authorities as an immense success.

Civil Police Secretary Felipe Curi declared: "The police didn't choose the outcome, they did." The "dead people are being officially treated as criminals who attempted to murder police officers," he concluded.

Even more emphatic in glorifying the police massacre was Rio's fascist Governor Cláudio Castro. Castro is a member of the Liberal Party (PL) of former President Jair Bolsonaro, sentenced in September to 27 years in prison for attempting a coup d'état.

"Yesterday, the only victims we had were police officers," Castro stated on Wednesday.

At that point, the government acknowledged only 64 deaths, including four police officers. Throughout the day, residents located more than 60 corpses in the woods surrounding the favelas. The bodies were found with signs of torture and their hands bound, indicating summary executions.

Among them was Iago Ravel, a 19-year-old found decapitated. The young man's mother charged: "They beheaded my son, cut his throat, hung [the head] on a tree, like a trophy. My son was murdered. They executed my son without the right to defense."

Openly defending these illegal and barbaric methods, Castro declared: "What evidence leads us to believe they were all criminals? The conflict wasn't in a built-up area. It was all in the woods. I don't believe anyone was strolling through the woods on a day of conflict. That's why we can safely classify them as criminals."

Explaining the deeper implications of the operation he launched, Castro stated:

This operation has very little to do with public security. It's a defense operation. [Because] this is a war that is crossing the limits that the state [of Rio de Janeiro] should be defending alone. For a

war like this, which has nothing to do with urban security, we should have much greater support. At this moment, perhaps even from the Armed Forces.

Castro then attacked the government of President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva of the Workers Party (PT) for refusing to provide military armored vehicles to Rio de Janeiro's police. "They said that for this, a Law and Order Guarantee (GLO) operation must be decreed. ... And since the president has already said he's against GLOs, we accepted the reality."

Castro's statements make it clear that the operation was deliberately conducted as a blood-soaked political spectacle by the same fascist forces that promoted the January 8, 2023 coup attempt and remain committed to its dictatorial objectives.

On the afternoon of October 30, two days after the operation, Castro hosted at Guanabara Palace, seat of Rio's state government, a meeting of far-right governors that launched the "Peace Consortium," an interstate coalition supposedly aimed at fighting "organized crime."

Attending the meeting were governors Romeu Zema of Minas Gerais, Ronaldo Caiado of Goiás, Jorginho Mello of Santa Catarina, Eduardo Riedel of Mato Grosso do Sul, and Celina Leão, vice-governor of the Federal District. Tarcísio de Freitas, governor of São Paulo, participated by video conference.

The characterization of the targets of last week's murderous operation as "narcoterrorists" or "narcoactivists," terms employed by Castro and his allies, leaves no doubt about the coordination between their fascist conspiracy and the US imperialist offensive being conducted by Donald Trump's administration against Latin America.

At the same time that Brazilian police committed their mass killing in Rio de Janeiro's favelas, under the same pretext of fighting "narcoterrorism," the US military expanded a campaign of illegal strikes against fishing boats in Latin American waters that has already killed 65.

The extra-judicial executions in the Caribbean Sea and the eastern Pacific are part of the advanced preparations for a full scale US war for regime change against Venezuela.

It is no accident that Flávio Bolsonaro, son and political accomplice of the convicted former president, has systematically promoted Washington's assassinations and demanded their expansion to Guanabara Bay in Rio de Janeiro. In response to Castro's massacre, Flávio declared that Rio "needs operations like these every day."

Besides the active plans for imperialist interventions against Latin America, the legitimization of summary state executions is bound up with Trump's efforts to establish a fascist dictatorship within the United States itself.

The overthrow of the most basic legal democratic norms by American

imperialism signals to Latin American ruling classes and military commands that it is time to return to dictatorial methods of rule.

The Lula government and the PT in Brazil are embracing the false pretext of “combating crime” used in the offensive by the Brazilian fascists and imperialism, as they desperately seek accommodation to them.

Lula declared after the Rio de Janeiro massacre:

We cannot accept that organized crime continues destroying families, oppressing residents, and spreading drugs and violence through cities. We need coordinated work that strikes at the backbone of trafficking without putting police officers, children, and innocent families at risk.

Bowing to Castro’s blackmail, the PT government immediately sought to display its intent to collaborate with the escalating repression in Rio de Janeiro.

After sending Justice Minister Ricardo Lewandowsky to Rio’s Guanabara Palace, the government announced the creation of an “Organized Crime Combat Office” to “eliminate barriers” between state and federal administrations. It also deployed large Federal Police forces that are being mobilized to Rio de Janeiro.

All criticism of the murderous police operation by PT leaders has been framed in the context of promoting their own role in the “fight against crime.”

The Minister of Institutional Relations and the PT’s former national party president, Gleisi Hoffmann, claimed that the far-right governors behind the Peace Consortium “invest in political division and want to put Brazil on the radar of Donald Trump’s military interventionism in Latin America.” She proposes, instead, “joining forces in combating organized crime, as proposed by the Security Constitutional Amendment sent by President Lula to Congress.”

Another section of the PT leadership, however, openly supports the violent buildup of the bourgeois state apparatus.

The PT’s national vice-president and mayor of Maricá, Washington Quaquá, has openly vindicated the Rio de Janeiro massacre, claiming that “no one confronts assault rifles with kisses.” He declared his “solidarity with the families of police officers killed in the operation, true heroes who fell in combat against organized crime.”

The PT is thus directly collaborating with fascist forces committed to establishing a dictatorship in Brazil.

Throughout successive governments over the last two decades, the PT has been responsible for a massive escalation of state repression, an exponential increase in the prison population, and the growing deployment of the military in internal operations against the Brazilian population.

In 2007, on the eve of the Pan American Games, Lula’s second administration oversaw the military invasion of the Alemão Complex of favelas. “The people saw the armed forces serving the Brazilian people,” Lula declared about the most violent operation in the favelas seen until then.

President Dilma Rousseff, his successor, dramatically increased the intensity and scope of such military operations, using them against workers’ demonstrations and for “social cleansing” of Rio de Janeiro in the context of the 2014 World Cup and the 2016 Olympic Games. In March 2016, Dilma signed the Anti-Terrorism Law, which today serves as the basis for the fascist forces’ attempt to expand the definition of “terrorism” according to the demands of American imperialism.

The federal intervention in Rio de Janeiro, decreed in February 2018 by interim president Michel Temer after Dilma’s impeachment, represented

the logical development of this militarization process. The commander of the unprecedented intervention in Rio was Gen. Walter Souza Braga Netto, who assumed absolute powers over the state’s security forces.

Braga Netto later became minister of Defense and Bolsonaro’s vice-presidential candidate in 2022, and was the main co-conspirator in the January 8 fascist coup attempt, for which he was sentenced to 26 years in prison. Nothing better exposes the implications of the “public security” policies promoted by the PT.

Lula is continuing this course. Amid the critical events of the January 8, 2023 coup attempt, he rejected calls from the military command and his defense minister to decree a GLO, explaining that, once the operation began, “Lula ceases to be the government so that some general can assume the government.”

However, already in November 2023, the PT government decreed a GLO mobilizing the three armed forces to assume control of operations in the ports and airports of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, as well as on the borders with Uruguay, Argentina and Paraguay. Under the declared pretext of combating drug trafficking, the operation was widely interpreted as merely a political showcase for the military.

Today, as it makes increasing concessions to Rio’s Governor Castro, Bolsonaro and their allies, the PT and its pseudo-left supporters cite the “popularity” of the far-right’s appeals for “public security.”

Such fascist demagoguery can only find an echo in a political and social environment whose most striking feature is the absence of an organized working class movement, a political crime for which the PT and the pseudo-left are directly responsible.

Mass indignation against conditions of growing social inequality, lacking hopes in the future, and the rottenness of the political system find no channel in any of the existing parties or official unions.

But the recent explosive events are having a profound impact on the consciousness of broad layers of Brazilian workers and youth.

Analyzing the Brazilian political environment after the intense repercussion of the film *I’m Still Here*, the *World Socialist Web Site* observed the existence of a widespread sense in society that “resolving the current acute political crisis is impossible without a serious reckoning with the country’s history,” particularly with the “crimes and dark legacy of the 1964-85 military dictatorship.”

The connections between the methods and prevalence of state violence that existed under the military dictatorship and the barbaric scenes in Rio de Janeiro’s favelas last week did not go unnoticed.

Massive protests involving the victims’ family members, residents of the favelas and other segments of the population erupted in Rio de Janeiro, appropriately denouncing Governor Castro as the real “terrorist.” On Friday, demonstrations spread throughout the country, occurring simultaneously in dozens of cities.

New protests against state violence and Cláudio Castro’s government are scheduled for Wednesday, November 5.

It is essential that the growing wave of political radicalization be directed toward building a mass movement in the working class and a revolutionary leadership capable of instilling in this movement an internationalist socialist perspective.



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