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Brazil, Bolsonaro, Covid-19

Brazil's darkest hour requires anti-fascist unity

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As of May 28, Brazil reported 411,821 confirmed coronavirus infections, and 25,598 Covid-19 deaths, figures which are believed to undercount deaths by at least 50 percent. Meanwhile, the political crisis is escalating by the day as President Trump has banned all travel from Brazil to the United States and the Brazilian Supreme Court released a video of far-right President Jair Bolsonaro's cabinet meeting in which he threatens his opponents repeatedly in an obscenity-ridden tirade. As Bolsonaro attempts to sure up his right flank, Brazil's left-wing parties and social movements have united to file an impeachment petition in the national congress. [NBN]

The Brazilian left and working classes are living through the most decisive chapter in our history as we advance along a dangerous road covered in shadows and shrouded in fog. The scenario in Brazil, which has not stabilized since 2013-2014, has been overrun by a global pandemic and recession, all while under the thumb of a neofascist government that heaps hatred on its opponents, denies the reality of the crisis, and is accelerating its authoritarian, ultra-neoliberal project.

It is as if the pandemic has broken down the door of history, torn up the script, and rearranged the rhythms of the crisis — without pointing out any road map for solving the country's dilemmas. In the coming period, the global and the national, the external and the internal, will become increasingly inseparable. It is not possible to develop analyses or policies from a purely national perspective. Just like the pandemic, the phenomenon of neofascism is global.

Twenty-five thousand have already died from Covid-19 and almost 400,000 have been infected. We are losing close to a thousand lives every twenty-four hours, the ICUs are collapsing, people must wait in inhuman lines for government aid that barely assuages their hunger, and projections of economic decline range between 5 and 7.5 percent of GDP, which will translate into more unemployment and greater poverty. Brazil's reaction to the virus may be the worst on the planet, it is the price we are paying for structural inequality and the nature of the administration that occupies the Planalto and Esplanada, our national seat of government.

And if all that was not enough, we are witnessing the worsening of a political-institutional crisis playing out at the highest levels of the Brazilian state, the longest and most serious crisis of the last three decades, perhaps in the history of the Republic. A crisis that is yet another chapter in the long and intractable Brazilian national crisis, a crisis that broke wide open when the overwhelming majority of the nation's capitalists decided to dispose of the Workers Party's (PT) conciliatory project and opt instead for a coup against democratically elected President Dilma Rousseff in 2016, a coup that brought interim president Michel Temer and then Jair Bolsonaro and his totalitarian ultra-neoliberalism to power.

Contrary to what all those who conspired for the coup expected, however, Bolsonaro did not end the crisis of the elite's political project. Simply put, Bolsonarism did not come into the world to negotiate or agree on anything, but to intensify conflicts and overcome his adversaries through force of arms. The recording of the ministerial meeting on April 22 demonstrated his (and his cabinet's) profound contempt for human life. The ministers and high-ranking officials seated around Bolsonaro did not focus on public policies to prevent the Covid-19 genocide. Instead, the meeting merely proved Bolsonaro's determination to face down every individual or institution that might attempt to impose limits on him or might refuse to obey him militarily. He revealed his plan to organize armed civilian troops to defend his government, his obsession with control over any investigations, and his absolute priority of protecting his family and friends. The video shed light on the shockingly submissive attitudes the military men serving as cabinet ministers in the face of the former captain's incendiary and threatening speeches. These were the men who were supposed to act like sensible "fireman" by keeping Bolsonaro under control.

In short, the video shows a two-hour rant by a gang leader and the most embarrassing groveling on the part of the ministers, the most pathetic cabinet assembled in Brazil's history. The video showed Bolsonaro's minions to be most concerned with selling "the fucking Bank of Brazil," ordering the arrest of governors and mayors, and "riding herd" over regulations in violation of the law. It is noteworthy how much the financial press downplayed Minister of the Economy Paulo Guedes' speeches during the meeting, of his political and theoretical defense of ultra-neoliberalism, and his opposition to any draft emergency plan for the country's economic recovery. Instead, Guedes once again prescribed downsizing the government, structural adjustment for states and municipalities, and "more reforms." After all, the media and a large part of the Brazilian business community agree with Guedes.

Fierce inter-institutional conflict

The conflict between Bolsonaro's militarized government and the Supreme Court (STF) already demonstrates threats to the limited democratic rules in force. Operating behind Bolsonaro, we find another dangerous ingredient in the crisis, that is, the direct participation of sectors of the military, from the military's reactions to the video, from Bolsonaro's intervention into the Federal Police, and in the strange operations of the Federal Police themselves. Just today, a group of dozens of reservists published a letter in defense of Bolsonaro's Chief of Institutional Security, Augusto Heleno, filled with insults directed at the Supreme Court. The letter endorsed a threat made by Heleno on Friday that the Court's seizure of the cell phone video could have "unpredictable consequences for institutional stability."

In addition to the threats from the barracks, the fact is that Bolsonarism can count on enthusiastic support from the men of the military, the civilian police, and the militias. Still worse, a part of the poorest workers are reluctant to abandon their support for the government, partly because of the economic situation brought on by Covid-19 – combined with the real impossibility of them quarantining themselves – the fake news generated by the president's "office of hate," and the nefarious role played by evangelical merchants of faith who have allied themselves with the authoritarian, patriarchal, racist, homophobic, and individualistic agenda of the government's hardcore.

Military personnel, police officers, and militia members are not new characters in the soap opera of the national crisis that began in 2013. After all, these forces have unjustly killed more poor and black Brazilians than the pandemic. The difference today is that they have, for the first time, a leader whom they can call their own, and he is sitting in Planalto. This are, schematically, the outlines of the political-social polarization in which we are living.

How is the government's support holding up?

Most of the opposition forces were disappointed with the political impact of the video's release. In fact, Bolsonaro's aggressive and authoritarian speech resonated positively with his fanatical base of support, calculated by political and statistical scientists to hover between 15 and 20 percent of the electorate. And his firmness and "manner" lead another 10 to 15 percent to rate his job performance as "great" or "good." There is no doubt that neofascist Bolsonarism has mass influence. This support results from a combination of international trends and recent historical circumstances in which the profound erosion of the PT and the broader left stand out, the latter due to PT corruption and broken promises.

However, analysts of all serious hues (excluding the fascists) indicate that, if the video plays well to the pro-coup mob, it has alienated a part of the center or center-right electorate from the government – a sector that voted for him in part – because it reveals his genocidal beliefs as well as exposing potential crimes carried out under the

responsibility of several ministers, including Minister of Education Abraham Weintraub and Minister of Human Rights, Family and Women Damares Alves, not to mention the macabre plans Economic Ministers Ricardo Salles and the aforementioned Guedes. These same (non-Marxist) pollsters call attention to the fact that the rejection of Bolsonaro is growing at a faster rate than his support, leading to an extreme polarization.

It is never possible to simply take opinion polls at face value, even more so when they are conducted by means of telephone questionnaires. It is true that Bolsonaro does not yet have a clear plan nor well-organized armed gangs. However, it is less clear that he emerged weakened from the latest clashes because, if it is true that he isolated himself politically, it is also true that he was quick to counterattack.

Regardless, there is an almost unanimous consensus that the video, and military's reactions to it, served to aggravate the conflict between institutional powers in the state. One hypothesis states that this intense polarization may act as an accelerant for an active intervention by the repressive forces, as Bolsonaro calls them. A Bolivian-type plot leading to some form of police-military coup cannot be ruled out among the many possible outcomes.

To move beyond the limitations of opinion polls, it is necessary to analyze the relationship of forces between the social classes. It is evident that the 2016 coup put the working classes and the left on the defensive, a situation aggravated by a series of defeats by Temer and the election of a neofascist president.

The big question is whether or not this series of setbacks constituted an irreversible defeat and with what policy we may act to reverse it. It is not worth discussing whether the defeat was historic or not, because history is only defined retroactively, in the temporality of decades. Besides, before coming to such an assessment, it is necessary to continue playing out the battle. Unless, of course, one adopts the posture merely observing and analyzing the collapse.

The social, and probably electoral, opposition in Brazil today is composed of a minority of the bourgeois sectors – growing since the pandemic's onset – an important, if not majority, portion of the highest paid wage earners (civil servants, teachers, health personnel, bank employees, some low-level managers, and gig workers – people who, just because they are not industrial workers, should not be, by Manichean opposition, considered middle class), part of the professional class, freelancers, small peasants, intellectuals (both artists and scientists), the vanguard of the most dynamic social movements (such as the feminist, black, and youth movements), and a difficult-to-measure portion of the poorest workers, including the homeless and landless.

On the other hand, Bolsonaro and his governing nucleus, however unqualified and morally questionable they may be, can still count on support from a highly-visible, if not majority, part of the poor and working-class people in the slums and urban peripheries, all with the ideological help of the neo-Pentecostals. In addition, he draws support from the majority of medium and small businessmen, from foulmouthed industrialist to taxi drivers. In other words, from the property-owning middle classes. Based on all this, how can we understand the political picture?

There is no doubt that it is necessary to fight to build an anti-fascist and left-wing solution to the crisis in order to undermine the base that Bolsonarism maintains among the poorest workers. But it is neither sensible nor effective (from the point of view of the results we hope for) to overlook the importance of dividing the enemy and weakening even his middle-class bases, not least because the social opposition to Bolsonaro also contains in it what some erroneously dismiss as sections of the "middle class." But this understanding of class is based on schemes from the last century which do not incorporate the great transformations caused by neoliberalism in social relations, and it leads to prejudices that only hinder the need for antifascist action.

If it is not right to deprecate the enemy's strength and deny our own recent defeats, then neither is it useful to

consider the political situation and social classes to be static, as if they are frozen in a photo, or to assume that the subordinate classes have been defeated beforehand. The unimaginable dimension of the economic and social crisis imposed by the pandemic on both the planet and the country will certainly give rise to new social conflicts and rebellions, and these will be both deeper and more violent. It is essential that the socialist left goes beyond licking its wounds, we must participate (and contend for our ideas) in these spontaneous explosions and organized struggles to come. There is no other way to resist and have a chance to change the balance of forces.

What kind of unity?

The relationship between the anti-fascist front and the independence of the exploited classes the “day after” the pandemic and the great recession will be better or worse depending on our willingness to fight, our comprehension of the social changes underway, our ability to develop politics for each reality, and the capacity of self-organization from below. We have, in Brazil, the serious problem of facing off against a neofascist project that incessantly attacks, one that is now on the offensive, and even winning today’s match. We must stop Bolsonaro! And not only by means of institutional struggle.

The Party for Socialism and Freedom must be at the forefront of the call for unity among all who oppose the neofascist project represented by Bolsonaro and his supporters. It is necessary to work for a strong and diverse anti-fascist unity – the broader, the more diverse, the better – in which we must renounce the dominance of any one party and the struggle of egos.

To overcome fascism, it is not enough for this coalition to come together for parliamentary, judicial, and media actions – already a lot of work – even if elections and more elections are on its horizon. It is necessary to start immediately thinking about taking actions, mobilizing this political bloc onto the streets. We must raise specific demands against authoritarianism, for instance, against the new threats to the Supreme Court, in support of investigating fake news, for united action against the extreme right’s lies.

We must denounce and demand in-depth investigations into police operations in poor and working-class urban peripheries, call for the punishment of those guilty of the killing of João Pedro (a young, black man), oppose widespread armament of the militias, and changes in environmental infrastructure regulations. We must speak out against the Ministry of Health’s pro-chloroquine statements, oppose threats made against activist educators made under the right-wing banner of “schools without parties.” And we must defend the integrity of indigenous lands under the law. We cannot reject specific electoral alliances as long as they do not annul PSOL’s character.

At the same time, two hesitations should be avoided by social movements from below and PSOL. First, it is not always useful to wait for everyone with whom we might want to unite to make up their minds and join in before we take initiatives. The second has to do with the party’s commitment, which we must assert, to the struggle for the autonomy of movements of the exploited and oppressed in the face of possible attempts to coopt them by bourgeois sectors of the anti-fascist front.

Anti-fascist unity is tactical. It is critical, but it is tactical. The anti-fascist front’s program is a defensive program, it opposes further setbacks and it is necessary in this period. However, the program or platform of the totality of movements that may come out of the crisis – a unity that must be built – cannot be subordinated to the limits that our more conjunctural anti-fascist allies will seek to impose. For instance, we will support campaigns for taxing the great fortunes, for equality, for equal opportunities in healthcare that even democratic businessmen and the civilized propertied middle classes may not join.

Brazil's darkest hour requires anti-fascist unity

An anti-capitalist and eco-socialist program goes far beyond what is possible with allies of such a diverse class nature. An ecosocialist program is ecological, feminist, and anti-racist. There is no contradiction between being champions of anti-fascist unity, as the PSOL should be, and at the same time maintaining an autonomous identity, with our own program and proposals for solutions to the crisis. The vanguard of the movement and the mass sectors will fight for an alternative to neoliberal capitalism, and the consumerist and productivist model favored by those who support an oligarchic, patriarchal, and neo-slavery Republic.

Keeping all the differences with the historical circumstances of the last century in mind, in which our forebears acted, the anti-fascist front was never conceived as a tactic that subordinated socialists to bourgeois sectors or to reformist opponents of the social movements. Unity is an immediate necessity for the exploited and oppressed whereby revolutionaries should assert themselves as the most coherent class fighters in order to contend for a left-wing, communist alternative.

The anti-fascist front is an urgent necessity in Brazil to overcome fascism and advance toward a situation in which those from below can go on the offensive and start to win victories. In these struggles, be they in the mobilizing or political-ideological field, socialists will assert the superiority of our program.

The road is cloudy, gloomy, and fraught with danger. Times are difficult, but they are also contradictory and increasingly linked to crisis in which the whole world is living. We must move. What appears to be the darkest hour may, in fact, be only the prelude to an even longer darkness, yet, depending on our understanding and our choices, it may instead be, as the Arabic proverb says, the harbinger of dawn.

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Source: translated by [No Borders News](#) from [Insurgencia](#).

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