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**Covid-19 pandemic and Brazil**

# **Bolsonaro's necropolitical solution**

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**"Will some die? Yes, some people will die, I am sorry, this is life. Nor are we going to close the car factories due to the fact that there are traffic accidents." These were the most controversial statements regarding the management of the Covid-19 pandemic, made by Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro on 21 March 2020.**

Since the quarantine situation began to be generalized, two concepts have come to the surface. On the one hand, the tremendous vulnerability of societies in the global North (which believed themselves relatively immune to major catastrophes) has been revealed. On the other hand, the extent to which the death of a part of the population can be included in calculations and political management (a practice called "necropolitics").

As J lia Mart  indicated in the debate organized by *Anticapitalistas* on 12 April, "Ecosocialism or pandemics", the use of this term to explain what is happening in the European context is novel, since up to now the system seemed to reserve this type of political management of death to the social and geographical margins of our societies. In other countries, such as Brazil, necropolitics has been part of the DNA of large parts of the Brazilian state in recent decades, and the so-called "margins of society" are much broader than European societies. To give an idea of the magnitude of the effects of this policy, in 2019, 1,810 people died in police interventions in Rio de Janeiro alone (the number of people killed in relation to Covid-19 on April 14 was 1,335). This was the biggest such death toll for two decades, and Governor Wilson Witzel welcomed the fact that the security policy "was bearing fruit". Bolsonaro's delusional statements are not, therefore, an isolated case in Brazilian political history, but are part of decades of segregation of and attacks on the most precarious populations (the black and indigenous population, women, and sexual minorities).

Like in other countries, in Brazil, the epidemic is accompanied by the harsh impacts of a global recession that has been brewing for years. Forecasts indicate that the country will lose 5% of its GDP, and the number of unemployed people will become double the current number, standing at 12 million, with a 15% drop in income for the entire population (obviously this setback will have an impact on the different layers of society equivalent to the already existing tremendous inequalities). To mitigate these effects, the government has put forward a proposal to create a minimum income of R\$ 600 (which is equivalent to €100) for informal workers and 2,000 for formal workers, when the average wages are 1,400 and 2,300 reais respectively. In the framework of the debates on the need for a basic income, the Brazilian solution clearly falls within its most neo-liberal aspect.

The erratic management of President Bolsonaro and the "ideological fraction of the government" (which includes Bolsonaro and his associates as opposed to more "pragmatic" sectors) has undermined the already battered confidence that his allies (especially the sector originating from the army). In the current crisis, the president's denialist position regarding the pandemic has delegitimized his own Minister of Health, Luiz Henrique Mandetta, whom he no longer invites to meetings of the crisis group responsible for monitoring the pandemic.

Meanwhile, the health emergency catalyses the precariousness and existing inequalities in society. In 2017, more than 150,000 people died from poor medical care and 50,000 from lack of access to the public health system. In addition, 35 million people lack access to running water. In this context, what is the real possibility of the sanitary instructions of the confinement being applied, such as physical isolation or basic hygiene gestures? What is the possibility of having adequate medical attention in the event of a health emergency? According to various studies, the estimated number of victims ranges between 44,000 (in the event of all the sanitary measures dictated by the WHO being respected) and 530,000 if the instructions proposed by Bolsonaro himself to isolate only the elderly (over 60 years old) were followed. It should be noted that the life expectancy of the black population is precisely around 60 years, so that a criterion apparently as innocuous as that of age has a purely racial component. In fact, the available

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figures confirm what is also being observed in the USA: the majority of victims are racialized. While Bolsonaro opposes any measure that results in confinement, Mandetta is committed to highly flexible confinement. The reality is that in most federal states, a confinement similar to that existing in European countries is already being applied, at the initiative of the governments of these same states, preferring to avoid having to a bloodbath of the dead.

In the event that the coronavirus pandemic spreads throughout the Brazilian territory, we may expect one of the most reactionary managements of the health emergency. A policy that, in order to defend at all costs the privileges of a minority, will not hesitate to take advantage of the situation to attack the most vulnerable, justifying the death of thousands of people. We realize in the current context of the epidemic that links of solidarity from below must be strengthened more than ever, as well as giving them a political content, in the face of the atomization imposed by confinement and the authoritarian temptations of the states. This solidarity will have to be even stronger with those activists who, tirelessly, continue in their resistance to the criminal Bolsonaro government.

PS:

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