

The world health crisis and its unfolding in Brazil

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The health crisis that ravages the world due to COVID-19 has exposed all the fragility of the capitalist system. Haunted by a great economic crisis already foreseen since 2019, the capitalist powers and their entire mechanism of exploitation and accumulation of profits found themselves in the midst of a profound health crisis, which began in China and rapidly spread to all countries and continents. The virus imposed a new order, leading countries to adopt measures of isolation and social distancing in an attempt to prevent an even greater number of deaths. The isolation consequently anticipated and aggravated the economic crisis, leading several countries to adopt even harsher measures against workers to try to minimise the financial impacts on the accounts of the world's big business.

In Brazil, the situation is no different. The pandemic is spreading rapidly, and the numbers of cases and deaths are frightening. Today, June 20, the numbers exceed 50,000 dead and 1 million infected, according to official data, which are underreported. However, while other countries have adopted isolation measures that at first sight run counter to economic interests, in Brazil, the Bolsonaro government refuses to recognise the gravity of the disease. A government that follows the ideological line of "denial of science", Bolsonaro treats the disease as something simple and defends the idea that workers and children must "face" the virus to save the economy. Since the beginning of the contagion in Brazil, he has neglected the serious situation in which the country and the whole world find themselves. He has followed the same policy as Donald Trump and insists on the use of a chloroquine drug that generates more controversy than results in the treatment of COVID-19. Bolsonaro denies the guidelines of the WHO, does not adopt the slightest measure to control contagion and, moreover, has waged a war against governors and mayors who have adopted isolation measures in their respective states and municipalities.

The country is in a deep cultural/ideological war between supporters and opponents of Bolsonaro. Following the guidelines of the false philosopher Olavo de Carvalho, supported by evangelical leaders, with sectors that defend "flat Earth" theories, as well as fascist groups, we have a government that denies science by systematically cutting funds for scientific research in Brazil. The government's attitudes towards the pandemic overturned two health ministers in 26 days, as a result of divergences in the policy of confronting and controlling the spread of the disease and the use of chloroquine.

In the midst of the health crisis, the Brazilian government does not make the slightest effort to propose a policy of contagion control; on the contrary, all the time it insists on reopening all production and trade lines, exposing workers even more to the contagion of the disease. The Ministry of Health has no minister at present. In charge of the portfolio is an army general, acting on an interim basis. The military is increasingly in command of the government. While the disease spreads rapidly, the Bolsonaro government follows the capitalist creed through Minister of Economy Paulo Guedes by applying and deepening attacks on workers' rights and refusing to maintain basic income to support workers who have lost their jobs. For this, it uses the excuse of not having money, but it has allocated 3.2 trillion reais to bankers in recent months, making it clear whom this government wants to "save?".

In addition to the neglect of control of COVID-19 contagion, the scandal in relation to the deforestation of the Amazon and genocide of indigenous peoples has brought other consequences that seriously affect the Brazilian economy. The U.S. House Committee, with a majority of Democrats, is opposed to expanding trade agreements with Brazil. The situation will worsen if Democrat Joe Biden is elected because, according to former Ambassador Rubens Ricupero, "he is more committed to the environmental issue than Barak Obama?". The Dutch parliament rejected ratification of the MERCOSUR-EU agreement, because it disagrees with environmental policy in the Amazon and with agricultural competition. Brazil's deep economic crisis tends to worsen in the face of harmful policies of environmental destruction and its consequences for foreign relations.

Political crisis, ideological escalation.

Amidst this whole health crisis, the Bolsonaro government has been facing a deep political crisis ever since the resignation of one of the government's top ministers, former Judge Sergio Moro, who was responsible for the "jet wash" investigations, condemned Lula and made it possible to elect Bolsonaro in 2018. On leaving the ministry, Moro exposed the dispute for control of the federal police and Bolsonaro's interests in protecting his children, especially Senator Flavio Bolsonaro, who is being investigated for crimes of corruption and money laundering among other charges.

Moro's departure, and the release of the video of the ministerial meeting at which the federal police issue was exposed, weakened the government's support base, which forced Bolsonaro to seek support by distributing millionaire funds to congressmen from the so-called "centron"; the small right-wing parties that sell themselves in exchange for support in Congress. This manoeuvre caused Bolsonaro to lose some of his support because, during the electoral campaign, he said he rejected and would never practice the "old policy" of buying support in Congress. The video of the meeting was a blow to the government, as it shows ministers making racist statements, explicit attacks on public servants, environmental destruction and, perhaps most compromising, the statement by the Education Minister, Abraham Weintraub, which clearly attacks and threatens the Supreme Court ministers.

After these events, a group that calls itself the "300 Brazilians" further exacerbated the problems. With a fascist character, the group camped in Brasilia for "war training", made an act of attacking the Supreme Court masked and with torches, in a clear allusion to the members of the Ku Klux Klan. All calls for the closure of the Supreme Court, are clearly supported by Bolsonaro. In recent days, the Court has authorised the breaking of banking confidentiality for Deputies of the Bolsonarista base, carried out searches and seizures of materials in their houses, and has provisionally arrested the leader of the fascist group "300 Brazilians". Bolsonaro, realising that the Court is increasing the pressure on the ideological nucleus of the government, made threats again, implying an intervention, a coup, with the threat of re-enacting the beginning of the "years of lead" of the coup of 64.

The response to these threats was the imprisonment of Fabricio Queiroz, a former advisor of Flavio Bolsonaro, during the investigations on financial flows connected to the office of Flavio Bolsonaro when he was still member of the state congress of Rio de Janeiro.

Fascist attitudes and reaction

The actions of the "300 group" shocked part of the Brazilian population because of the similarity with the acts practiced by fascist groups in the USA. With white masks and torches in their hands, they gathered in front of the Supreme Court making threats to attack the ministers of the Court. The reaction was quick. Fans linked to soccer clubs called "antifa club fans" called for actions to oppose the fascist advance. These demos were called without the participation of leftist entities or workers' representatives. Even though they were not so big, these had repercussions and bothered the government. It is interesting to point out that

these acts took place at the same time that in the United States and in several countries the reaction to George Floyd's death caused indignation in the face of the brutality committed by the police in Minneapolis.

The challenges to the left.

The Brazilian left is experiencing a moment of great challenge. Since the 2013 movements, when a wave of demonstrations took to the streets, the Right gained ground in these movements and Left flags and parties were rejected. The mobilisation supported the dangerous line of "no flag and no party," with nationalist speeches that began to give voice to groups that were organising to attack the then Rousseff government of the Workers' Party, PT. Right wing groups attracted a generation of young people and occupied the space opened up by the Left in the movements. There are several analyses that suggest that thousands of people, who had never participated in political actions before, joined and identified with these right-wing groups on the basis of a moralistic discourse that raised the defence of family, morals and good manners.

In this scenario, the evangelical churches, which have strong parliamentary representation in Congress, undoubtedly played an important role. This situation provided the basis for generalising hate speech in the 2014 elections, when Dilma was re-elected. After the electoral process, the coup-plotting right wing sustained the hate speech and prejudice that ended up overthrowing the government and dominating Brazilian society. This political discourse of hatred seriously influenced the 2018 elections and, even today, causes the Left to be rejected by most Brazilians, from the elite to the workers.

Until now, the Left, especially the PT, which is the largest party of the Left and main representative of the workers, has not placed itself as a leader for the movements. In this moment of social isolation, the situation is even worse, because we have no way of summoning people to street actions.

In this scenario of political crisis of the Bolsonaro government, actions by the Right against Bolsonaro are beginning to develop. After opinion polls revealed that the support base of Bolsonaro voters is around 30 percent, former "converted" banker Eduardo Moreira launched the campaign "we are 70 percent" against Bolsonaro on social networks.

Another action against Bolsonaro is the superpartisan manifesto of the movement "We are Together", which Right and Left leaders, artists, writers, religious leaders and others have signed. The manifesto is clearly against the demands of Jair Bolsonaro. However, Lula has opposed signing this manifesto. For him it is only an action to overthrow Bolsonaro and does not present the defence of the interests of the working class. Lula argues that the PT is capable of taking its own action against Bolsonaro and pointing the way out for the workers. For Lula, what this elite want is to take down Bolsonaro the man, but to maintain the Bolsonaro government, a government that imposes austerity policies against workers.

So far, we see no action by the PT towards the workers, no summons to organise the workers. We are in isolation, but most of the workers are not in isolation, because they are working or because they are not able to do so. Workers are being exposed to contagion on a daily basis, they are losing jobs or rights with the measures adopted by the government making the situation even worse.

The Brazilian left is in a situation where it is unable to assert itself within the movements, it does not assume the leadership role of the workers in Brazil today. It is a deep crisis that has opened space for the extreme right to occupy. The discourse of the extreme right that is in power has reached the working class. A reactionary, fascist discourse that preaches hatred of minorities, of education, of the arts. It has transformed teachers and culture into enemies of society, destroying teaching and scientific research. There is no dialogue within the Left. The few attempts at a united front were very short lived and did not achieve the proposed objectives. As the philosopher Vladimir Safatle said, the Brazilian Left suffers today,

a deep identity crisis. It is necessary to rescue this identity as the representative of the working class. What we have seen for years is a Left that is only concerned with the electoral agenda, with the possible votes and positions that can be achieved.

Lula is correct in saying that the PT does not have to sign a manifesto with coup plotters to get rid of Bolsonaro, that the party has an agenda for the workers, but he does not point out the way to the struggle, the mobilisation and the positioning of the PT and, of the main trade union confederation, CUT, as the main tools of the workers' struggle. Some analysts point out that with this discourse Lula is trying to reorganise the party's base in order to regain leadership in the near future, but by building on the old alliances with the right.

Meanwhile, several requests for impeachment are filed in Congress, but there is no sign that Rodrigo Maia, the chairman of Congress, will grant these requests. Bolsonaro is trying to strengthen himself through the support of the centre parties, the military and the police. It's a weak government, but one that keeps following the neoliberal agenda. While we workers suffer all the economic and social consequences of the pandemic, the government continues to attack rights and the Left does not move to organise struggles.

There is an urgent need for left-wing leaders, especially from the PT and the CUT, to call on the workers and that they go to the rank and file to say that this government is one of destruction and that we need to confront it. We know that isolation is necessary, but in the current situation, we have to tell the workers that it will not be possible to confront the disease, to have conditions of isolation, to guarantee decent living conditions, while the Bolsonaro government lasts. Only by overthrowing this entire government can we have the minimum conditions to demand better living, working and health care conditions.

We have to clearly tell the working class that a government that allocates 3.2 trillion to bankers and refuses to maintain aid to workers, does not care about the 50,000 deaths from corona, that cares only about the big businessmen and saving its own family, such a government can no longer be maintained.

In the face of this chaos, the left-wing parties need a fraternal debate to build a programmatic Left Front, with the agenda of the working class, containing their immediate and transitional demands. Only in this way will we achieve a left-wing government that represents the interests of the workers.

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