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European Languages

زبانهای اروپایی

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04.06.2020

Brazilian youth join international wave of protests against police violence

Responding to the massive demonstrations around the United States and the world, thousands of people took to the streets in Brazilian capitals protesting against police violence, racism and the government of Brazil's fascistic President Jair Bolsonaro.

On Sunday, hundreds of people participated in a demonstration in downtown Rio de Janeiro denouncing the deadly police operations in the *favelas*, which left 177 dead in April alone. The protest took as its symbol João Pedro Mattos, a 14-year-old black youth brutally murdered by the police in May. Although the protest was peaceful, the military police attacked the demonstrators, shooting them with rubber bullets and stun grenades. The TV station *Globo* filmed a policeman pointing a rifle at a defenseless demonstrator raising his hands in the air.

The same day, another demonstration took place in São Paulo, called by organized soccer fans who define themselves as "anti-fascists" and "in defense of democracy." The protest was attended by more than a thousand people and made references to the murder of George Floyd. In a place nearby, there was a small group of fascist supporters of Bolsonaro, who have been demonstrating every weekend in support of a military intervention and the end of social distancing measures against the coronavirus.



**Youth protest in Curitiba against racism and police violence, Monday, June 1.
(Credit: Twitter)**

The extreme right-wing militants provoked the demonstrators while being escorted by the military police, who then suppressed the protest with pepper spray, rubber bullets and a “rain of [tear gas and stun] grenades,” according to representatives of the Human Rights Commission of the OAB (Brazilian Bar Association). Six people were arrested.

Right-wing governor João Doria of the Brazilian Social Democratic Party (PSDB) welcomed the brutal action of the police, and said it was used to “protect” the demonstrators, preventing a possible conflict. He declared that his government will ban demonstrations in the same place and on the same day and said that the police will control more harshly those who attend future protests, i.e., will prevent them from happening.

After the protests in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, more than a thousand young people marched in Curitiba, capital of Paraná, on Monday night. The police brutally attacked the demonstrators and arrested eight people. Videos show policemen sweeping the streets of the city, throwing bombs and firing rubber bullets at the demonstrators. Police officers were also recorded attacking groups of demonstrators with batons, after they had already been dispersed.

In addition to street demonstrations, videos of Floyd's murder and images of protests and police violence in the US were widely shared on Brazilian social media. Hundreds of thousands felt immediate identification with the social conditions in the United States and with the political response against police violence that is growing internationally.

Brazil is one of the most unequal countries in the world and its contradictions are being intensified by the response of the ruling class to the coronavirus pandemic. The country already has more than 500,000 confirmed cases of COVID-19, a figure exceeded only by that of the United States. With the death toll having surpassed 30,000, the governments in every state, driven by Bolsonaro and a campaign by the media, are promoting the homicidal reopening of all economic activities.



Besides the danger of death from the virus, Brazilian workers are seriously threatened by misery and hunger. Unemployment, already staggering before the beginning of the pandemic, has grown with the cutting of more than five million jobs over the past few months. Among those who are still employed, wage cuts and contract suspensions already affect more than eight million.

The generalized economic despair is being answered by the Brazilian bourgeoisie with the intensification of state violence against workers, especially the most impoverished sections. The state of Rio de Janeiro, after registering last year a 92 percent increase in murders committed by the police, surpassed this rate during the pandemic. Compared to the same period last year, April and early May witnessed a 28 percent increase in the number of police raids on *favelas*, and a 58 percent rise in the deaths provoked by them. The terror deliberately spread by the police in the *favelas* and outskirts of Brazilian cities, many of them majority black, only prepares the generalized employment of violence against the working class and its social opposition to capitalism.

The fascist Bolsonaro—just like US President Donald Trump—is seeking a political base among the police and military for a move toward an openly dictatorial regime. In February of this year, political figures of the Bolsonaro administration led a military police strike in Ceará and spoke on stages to the mutinous cops arguing that “for the first time we have a president who knows what it is to be a military police officer.”

A report by *Portal Democratize* website reveals that one of the individuals responsible for the repression of the demonstration in São Paulo Sunday is a military police colonel who works for the Center for High Studies in Security of the Military Police and is a fanatical pro-Bolsonaro militant.

Bolsonaro is reinforcing his appeal to the military every weekend in the fascist demonstrations in front of the government palace in Brasilia, in which he is making increasingly ostentatious appearances. Last Sunday the president flew over the demonstration in an official helicopter and then paraded among the demonstrators mounted on a police horse.

Among the organizers of the demonstration in Brasilia is a fascist group directly promoted by government officials, “Brazil's 300.” The day before, they had staged a march against the Supreme Court, carrying torches as in the fascist demonstrations of the American Ku Klux Klan.



Bolsonaro's defense of a police state regime is openly and insistently based on the danger of an uprising of the working class against the capitalist order in Brazil. He has justified his proposals to intensify the domestic use of the army against the population based upon the danger of a massive working class uprising, such as what occurred in Chile at the end of 2019, characterized by him as “terrorist acts.”

At the beginning of the pandemic, he again warned that, “what happened in Chile will be nothing compared to what may happen in Brazil.” And more recently, at a ministerial meeting on April 22, publicized by court order, he claimed that current social conditions are a “fertile ground” for uprisings that threaten the established political order.

The right-wing shift of the ruling class all around the globe, and especially in the United States, is perceived by Bolsonaro as the main point of support for his authoritarian project. On Sunday, as his palace advisors discussed the possibility of deploying the National Guard to repress the initial demonstrations in São Paulo, Bolsonaro retweeted Donald Trump's post that threatened to declare "Antifa" a terrorist organization.

The growing hostility, especially among the youth, to the advance of authoritarianism and the formation of state-financed fascist groups is an important political development.

However, the development of a genuine struggle against fascism and for democratic rights is only possible through a massive political movement of the working class advancing an internationalist and socialist program.

No step forward is possible under the leadership of the bourgeoisie and the pseudo-left parties, who are trying to dominate this movement and whose task is to channel the social opposition behind the bourgeois state. In alliance with the official media, they seek to falsify the nature of the protests that are taking place in the United States and the world, classifying them as a racial movement.

By hiding the multiracial composition of the protests, they are attempting to conceal their own petty-bourgeois class interests, limiting their objectives to the pursuit of state reforms. By establishing that the essence of police violence is “structural racism,” a crime of which all whites are guilty, these reactionary political forces want to silence the working class and push the idea that placing more blacks in positions of power in the state and corporate hierarchy is enough to resolve society's contradictions.

The Workers Party (PT), one of the chief advocates of this right-wing policy, is promoting the candidacy for mayor of Salvador, capital of Bahia, a military police major, alleging that the fact of she is black and a woman makes her a natural representative of “popular interests.”

What these political forces fear the most, just as Bolsonaro and other bourgeois politicians, is increasing militancy within the working class. Workers in call centers, meat processing plants, hospitals and delivery services have staged independent strikes against

exploitation and unsafe working conditions promoted by the capitalists. It is to this revolutionary social force that the youth coming into struggle today must turn.

World Socialist 03.06.2020