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Brazilian political establishment, corporate media promote military as opposition to Bolsonaro

On Tuesday, Brazil's fascistic President Jair Bolsonaro sacked the country's military command in order to consolidate his grip over the state in anticipation of dictatorial measures against the working class amid a catastrophic spread of the COVID-19 pandemic and a dramatic intensification of the social crisis.

Since then, a consensus has begun to emerge from every faction of the political establishment and the corporate media in response to this ominous episode, which is without precedent in Brazilian history: the Brazilian military command was sacked because the Army, Navy and Air Force are committed to democracy and will not violate the Constitution.



Jair Bolsonaro. (Credit: Wikimedia Commons)

Brazil is currently the world epicenter of the COVID-19 pandemic, with an accelerating rate of more than 3,000 daily deaths, which is projected to reach 5,000 at some point between April and May. The country's health care system is in a state of collapse, with hospitals overflowing, and at least one cemetery in Sao Paulo digging up old graves to make way for a flood of new corpses.

The economic crisis resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic has thrown 22 million Brazilians into poverty, and unemployment has reached an all-time high of 14.2 percent in the first quarter.

Tensions within the ruling class, which have no progressive solution to the crisis, are mounting by the day. Deeply fearful of the consequences of the explosive social conditions, every political faction has lined up behind the assessment made by the conservative daily *Estado de S. Paulo*, which editorialized on April 1: "... faced with the perception that his government has been losing support, the president decided to apply pressure on the leaders of the Armed Forces to pick a side—him or the Constitution. The military obviously chose the Constitution."

Treating the sacking of the entire high command as a non-event due to the supposedly constitutionalist role of the military, the next day *Estado de S. Paulo's* editorial board wrote in a piece titled "Ignore the president": "One should not waste one's time correcting Bolsonaro's nonsense about a state of siege."

The "nonsense" the editorialists were directing the public to ignore is the president's assertion that any restraints on economic activity decreed by local authorities to stem the tide of COVID-19 deaths amount to a "state of siege." The appropriate response, according to Bolsonaro, is for himself to assume dictatorial powers in order to overthrow the local authorities.

On the very day of the dismissal of the military command, Bolsonaro's ally in the House, Representative Maj. Victor Hugo, attempted to push through a measure including pandemics among the situations in which the president could decree a "state of mobilization." The "state of mobilization" is a wartime measure allowing the president to

direct the production of public and private companies, and, most significantly, take control of the 560,000 members of the 27 state-controlled Military Police corps.

The emergency vote, ultimately blocked by House Speaker Arthur Lira, was the legal embodiment of the public declarations by Bolsonaro and his Congressional allies that “his armed forces” would not enforce anti-COVID-19 lockdowns.

Less than 24 hours before Tuesday’s firing of the high command, the head of the House Constitutional Panel, a Bolsonaro ultra-loyalist, tweeted that a psychotic episode by a Military Police soldier in the state of Bahia, who broke into a section of beach blocked to reduce COVID-19 contagion, shouting confused populist slogans about “not arresting workers” and shooting rifle rounds into the air before being brutally gunned down by a special forces squad, represented the beginning of a mutiny by security forces against local authorities.

On the previous day, in the industrial city of Juiz de Fora, in the state of Minas Gerais, a council member from the Bolsonaro-allied Brazilian Labor Party (PTB), Military Police Sgt. Mello Casal, declared in a live transmission on Facebook that a “militia” was set to assault the city’s municipal guard. Both the state of Bahia and the city of Juiz de Fora are ruled by the Workers Party (PT), which responded to the fascistic incitement by the PTB by posting on social media a video of the city guard’s officers armed and in uniform shouting law-and-order slogans.

Another vital component of the crisis which the bourgeois press wants the people to “ignore” is that the sacking of the military chiefs, including Gen. Fernando Azevedo e Silva, who headed the Defense Ministry, was decided on the eve of the commemoration by the Armed Forces of the 1964 US-backed military coup which inaugurated a 21-year blood-soaked regime. The first act of the new defense minister, Bolsonaro’s former chief-of-staff Gen. Walter Braga Netto, was to order an open celebration of the March 31, 1964 coup in barracks across the country.

Braga Netto’s military order of the day followed in the footsteps of the celebrations ordered by Bolsonaro since he took office in 2019, which were undersigned by the sacked commanders for two straight years. The two previous March 31 commemorations portrayed the coup as the result of a popular movement against the bourgeois-nationalist

government of President João Goulart of the Brazilian Labor Party. This year, however, marked the first time since 1985 that the word “celebration” was actually used in the military “order of the day.” After a falsely claiming popular “support” for the military’s seizure of power, it concluded, “so those events of March 31 must be understood and celebrated.”

Later in the day, the daily *Folha de S. Paulo* revealed that Braga Netto had changed the address prepared two days earlier by former Defense Minister Azevedo e Silva and presented to Bolsonaro on the day of his firing, excluding a previous reference to the armed forces as “state institutions” and including the celebratory conclusion.

Expressing the extraordinary tensions within the military ranks, both the capital and the east military commands had to issue express orders for soldiers and officers not to discuss publicly or on social media the sacking of the high command.

Such gag orders are taken at face value by the corporate media and political establishment as a defense of constitutional norms. They studiously ignore the historical revisionism being promoted by Bolsonaro, and fully supported by the sacked commanders, that the coup was a result of “pressure from below.”

Former Army commander, Gen. Eduardo Villas Bôas, who recently authored a book of memoirs describing the protracted drive towards dictatorship in Brazil since 2013, used precisely the idea of “pressure from below” to justify his 2018 tweet threatening a coup in case the Brazilian Supreme Court (STF) granted former Workers Party (PT) president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva a habeas corpus motion that would allow him to campaign alongside the party’s candidate and main Bolsonaro rival in that year’s election.

The same historical revisionist line toed by the high command was embraced by Bolsonaro’s vice president, Gen. Hamilton Mourão, who tweeted on March 31: “On this day 57 years ago, the Brazilian population, supported by the Armed Forces, stopped the International Communist Movement from putting its claws into Brazil. Strength and Honor!”

Last Friday, March 26, the Communist Party (PCdoB) governor of Maranhão, Flávio Dino, one of the most prominent leaders of the purported political opposition to

Bolsonaro, declared that replacing Bolsonaro with Mourão would mean “substituting civilization for barbarism.”

The main opposition party, the PT, has also fully embraced the line that the military represents the bulwark of democracy, with its House leader, Elvino Bohn Gass, stating that the sacking of the military command: “was a message that the Armed Forces are not in the service of a coup attempt.”

From *Estado de S. Paulo*—which openly supported the 1964 coup—to the PT, the Brazilian political establishment is attempting to conceal the real extent of the crisis of bourgeois rule in the country and the threat of an upheaval from below by Brazil’s increasingly restive working class.

Their promotion of a supposedly “constitutionalist” military echoes the pre-1964 crisis of the Goulart government. Then, the “legal” right wing represented by, among others, *Estado de S. Paulo*, predicted that the military would carry out a surgical coup, handing power back to civilians after Goulart’s ouster. For its part, the Labor Party, supported by the Stalinist Communist Party, trusted “nationalist” and “constitutionalist” elements within the high command to rein in the fascistic moods being whipped up by Goulart’s opposition. The result was 21 years of state terror, torture and murder that spread from Brazil to throughout Latin America.

The Brazilian ruling class and its military cannot be allowed to repeat these crimes. The working class must draw the lessons of the 1964 coup, as well as of the politics of the PT and its pseudo-left satellites, which have paved the way for the military re-establishing itself as the decisive political force in the country. A new revolutionary leadership must be built as a Brazilian section of the International Committee of the Fourth International.

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