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## **Mass anti-Bolsonaro protests as Brazil faces 550,000 COVID deaths**

Hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets of Brazil last Saturday in a new round of protests against fascistic President Jair Bolsonaro's murderous handling of the COVID-19 pandemic. The protests took place in hundreds of cities in all 26 Brazilian states and also abroad. In the largest of the demonstrations, 70,000 people gathered on Paulista Avenue in São Paulo, according to organizers.

It was the fourth day of mass demonstrations against Bolsonaro since May 29, when street protests began to take place after a deadly second wave of the pandemic in March and April, and amid the Senate Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry (PCI) investigation of the federal government's conduct in combating the pandemic. The PCI has already revealed evidence of both a deliberate policy of herd immunity, i.e., letting the virus spread and infect the largest number of people, and of corruption in the government's purchase of vaccines.

The demonstrations have been called by the so-called "Bolsonaro Out National Campaign," consisting of the Workers Party (PT) and other bourgeois parties such as the Socialist Party (PSB) and the Democratic Labor Party (PDT), along with the PT's pseudo-left satellites, such as the Socialism and Freedom Party (PSOL) and all the Brazilian union federations—including the PT-controlled CUT, the Morenoite Conlutas, linked to the pseudo-left Unified Socialist Workers Party (PSTU), and Força Sindical, whose origins date back to the Brazilian military dictatorship.



Mass protest on Paulista Avenue in São Paulo, July 24. (Credit: Mídia Ninja)

In a statement released on June 21, the Brazilian union federations affirmed that the demonstrations are intended to “pressure the president of the Lower House, Arthur Lira,” who is responsible for deciding whether to open impeachment proceedings, “to put on the agenda one of the more than one hundred impeachment requests.”

This demand reveals much of the character of these organizations and where they are seeking to direct the opposition against Bolsonaro. In 2019, the first year of the Bolsonaro government, Brazil saw the largest demonstrations in years against the federal government’s cuts on education. Since then, the PT, the pseudo-left and the unions have all worked to divert this enormous popular dissatisfaction behind the capitalist state, from the presidential elections to empty appeals to Congress and the Supreme Court against Bolsonaro. And they have used the demonstrations to relieve the enormous social pressure from below and to get this potentially explosive movement under control.

Since 2019, the union federations have also begun to hold joint May Day rallies, in which they have brought the most right-wing figures in Brazilian politics onto their platforms. These are politicians responsible for carrying out broad attacks against the Brazilian working class over the years and who supported Bolsonaro’s election, even as they would later try to distance themselves from him. This mainly includes officials of the Brazilian Social Democracy Party (PSDB), who joined the last two May Day rallies that featured the hated former president Fernando Henrique Cardoso. This year, the governor of São Paulo,

João Doria, was also expected to attend it, but the CUT, in view of the wide negative repercussions, ended up blocking his participation.

This rotten political alliance culminated in the launching of a “super-request” for Bolsonaro’s impeachment by the PT, the PSOL and the unions along with far-right parties and figures. Among Bolsonaro’s former supporters who signed the impeachment request delivered on June 30 were the reactionary federal deputies Alexandre Frota (PSDB) and Kim Kataguirí, of the liberal Free Brazil Movement (MBL), one of the leaders of the demonstrations for the impeachment of former PT president Dilma Rousseff in 2016 on trumped-up charges.

In the next round of mass demonstrations, which took place just a week after, on July 3, the presidents of the PT and PSOL, Gleisi Hoffmann and Juliano Medeiros, as well as the PSOL’s Morenoite factions Resistência and Socialist Left Movement (MES), openly advocated the participation of right-wing parties, in order to develop a “mass” struggle against Bolsonaro, according to them.

A new reactionary political alliance was formed for last Saturday’s demonstrations, dubbed the “Democratic Bloc.” It includes the Maoist Communist Party of Brazil (PCdoB), openly right-wing parties like PSDB and Cidadania, and the “political renewal” movements Renova and Acredito, funded by big business and whose members in Congress supported Bolsonaro’s 2019 pension reform. The rotten and pro-corporate union federations, including Força Sindical, are also part of this bloc, as are student organizations linked to the PCdoB, such as the National Union of Students (UNE). The PCdoB is the main advocate for the protests to take on a nationalist “green and yellow” (the colors of the Brazilian flag) character, banning “red,” identified with the left, in order to form a “broad front” against Bolsonaro.



"Democratic Bloc" waving Brazilian flags in São Paulo (Credit: WSWs Media)

This whole process is happening as the pandemic continues to rage in Brazil. The demand for controlling the spread of the virus by closing schools and businesses has been completely excluded by the political parties and the unions leading the demonstrations. These political forces are acting to give a criminal cover for the continuation of the ruling class' herd immunity policy.

In São Paulo, this has been happening through regular meetings between the union federations, including the CUT, and Governor Doria. These meetings serve the sole purpose of giving the millionaire governor a "social façade"—by promoting meager policies such as a subsidy for the purchase of cooking gas, at the request of the unions—while he pushes for a full reopening of all economic activities and schools.

Although the numbers of COVID-19 infections and deaths have decreased over the past month as vaccinations have increased, as of Saturday Brazil still had an average of 1,168 daily deaths and 37,885 infections. Brazil has already recorded 549,500 COVID-19 deaths, trailing only the US. São Paulo state alone recorded 418 deaths and 12,086 new cases last Friday.

With community transmission of the Delta variant confirmed in seven states and without the implementation of lockdown measures, experts warn that Brazil may see a new rise in the coming weeks, as in the US and Europe.

In the face of mass protests, the uncontrolled pandemic and revelations emerging from the COVID PCI, Bolsonaro and his allies have increased their threats of an electoral coup, adopting the same methods employed by Donald Trump in the last US presidential elections. Bolsonaro continues to advance his false claim that Brazil's electronic voting system can and will be rigged to favor the election of former PT president, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva.

A July 22 report by the daily *Estado de S. Paulo* revealed that these coup threats have been backed by Bolsonaro's defense minister, Gen. Walter Braga Netto. He was appointed to this position as part of Bolsonaro's unprecedented sacking of the entire military command with the open purpose of aligning the armed forces behind his reactionary agenda. The *Estado* reported that, in early July, Braga Netto, accompanied by the armed forces commanders, asked an interlocutor to warn House Speaker Arthur Lira that there would be no elections next year if there were no "printed and auditable ballots."

A bill mandating printed ballots is also scheduled for a vote in August by a congressional special commission. The author of this bill is the right-wing federal deputy Bia Kicis, one of Bolsonaro's most loyal allies. She met last Friday with Beatrix Von Storch, a leader of the fascistic Alternative for Germany (AfD), accompanied by the president's son Eduardo Bolsonaro, who was in Washington on January 6, taking lessons from the coup attempt.

The response of the PT, and Lula in particular, to this development was one of total complacency and political opportunism. *Globo*'s columnist wrote last week that "the former president was silent on the *Estado* report that revealed ... the [Braga Netto] threat ... so as not to place himself at odds with the military." She further stated that "Lula has not spared efforts to get closer to the military."

Both the PT's record and the more recent moves by the party and Lula expose the fraudulence of their supposed opposition to Bolsonaro, as well as to everything the fascistic president stands for, including the threat of dictatorship. This also applies to the pseudo-left organizations and the unions, whose reactionary claim that bringing the right wing to the protests would make them more massive was quickly exposed. In São Paulo, the so-called "Democratic Bloc" managed to gather only a few dozen union and party bureaucrats with Brazilian flags in front of their sound truck on Paulista Avenue.



As in previous protests, the working class was completely absent as an organized social force. This contrasts with the intense opposition that has developed within the Brazilian working class throughout the pandemic, with protests and strikes by teachers as well as industrial, app delivery, health care, oil and transportation workers in defense of their living conditions and their own lives against the uncontrolled spread of COVID-19. This movement has been deliberately isolated and sabotaged by the unions.

It is to this developing movement that the protesting youth and workers must turn, and not to the dead end of bourgeois politics represented by the PT and its satellites in the pseudo-left and the unions. For this purpose, a conscious and complete break with these organizations is required. It is necessary to construct a new revolutionary leadership, the Socialist Equality Group, which is fighting to build a Brazilian section of the International Committee of the Fourth International.

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