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Brazil's Bolsonaro seeks ouster of chief election official amid coup threats

On August 20, Brazil's fascistic President Jair Bolsonaro took another step in his preparations for an overthrow of the 2022 elections, in which he faces an evergrowing prospect of defeat. Bolsonaro sent the Brazilian Senate a petition to remove Supreme Court (STF) Justice Alexandre de Moraes, who has been chosen by the Electoral Court (TSE) to oversee next year's general elections.

As widely anticipated, the petition was repealed by the president of the Senate days later, a fact entirely secondary to Bolsonaro's plans.



Brazilian Army commandos. (Credit: Marcos Corrêa/PR)

Moraes is not only the next chief election official, but also the leading judge in an investigation targeting organizers of demonstrations calling for the army to shut down the STF as well as Congress. This probe recently moved a step closer to Bolsonaro himself.

Bolsonaro charged Moraes with curbing the fascist organizers' "freedom of speech." Among them is the head of the right-wing Brazilian Labor Party (PTB), who had recently organized the mass entry of the traditional fascist Integralista movement into the party's ranks. On August 20 itself, the Federal Police (PF) carried a search-and-seizure operation against Bolsonaro supporters, who had called for an armed invasion of the STF and Congress on Brazilian independence day, September 7.

Bolsonaro's charges against Moraes are aimed at turning the TSE into a target of violence by his most loyal supporters, including a number of active-duty military officers and fascistic mobs, in the run-up to the October 2022 elections.

He is studiously following the playbook of Donald Trump. His son, Eduardo, has been in constant consultation with Trump's extreme right-wing allies, including Steve Bannon. The goal is to provoke enough violence and chaos to sway the armed forces into intervening in support of his allegations that the elections are being actively manipulated against him. Bolsonaro counts on the bloody history of the Brazilian armed forces, which barely four decades ago were at the helm of a 21-year blood-soaked dictatorship backed by US imperialism. This regime served, from the 1964 coup on, as an operational and political bridgehead for the imposition of even bloodier fascist-military dictatorships across the region.

At the heart of the coup plotting is an all-out attack on Brazil's electronic voting system. Bolsonaro relentlessly claims the system is an "unverifiable" black box, and only a backup printer attached to every electronic ballot box could make it trustworthy. He also claims that the 2014 elections were rigged to guarantee the victory of the Workers Party (PT), a claim denied by the runner-up Aécio Neves and every significant political force, and that in 2018 he was robbed of votes in order to force a second round contest with the PT. His claims have been vehemently and repeatedly denied by every concerned party, including the TSE, the Federal Police and all congressional parties.

In order to press ahead with his plans to overturn the coming election, Bolsonaro sent to Congress a constitutional amendment mandating the use of “printed ballot” backups for 2022, which failed to pass the House threshold of 60 percent required to make constitutional changes. However, 40 percent of deputies cast ballots in favor of the proposal just hours after Bolsonaro ordered a column of tanks to roll past Congress and the STF in what was widely recognized as a threat.

The substantial support for the measure, despite every congressional party taking a position against it, was claimed by Bolsonaro as a moral victory. After the vote, he claimed that the House vote was illegitimate because deputies voting against his proposal did so out of fear of retribution by the TSE and the STF.

The timing of the action against Moraes, coming barely hours after the September 7 demonstration’s organizers were targeted by investigators, has been seen—correctly—by the fascists as a presidential endorsement.

According to political pundit Guilherme Amado of *Metrópoles*, Bolsonaro himself has shared on WhatsApp groups a fascistic call for demonstrations as preparation for a “counter-coup,” making a reference to the 1964 coup, which the military still describes as a “revolution” and a “reaction” to supposed plans to install a communist dictatorship.

In the calls, the actions of Congress, the TSE and the STF are described as illegal, and the case is made that demonstrations are needed to guarantee the armed forces “popular support” for a “reaction” against electoral fraud.

The call has gained support from a number of deputies of the so-called “bullet caucus” of retired Military Police (PM) officers, who are specifically calling for soldiers to attend. At least one PM commanding officer, Col. Aleksander Lacerda, head of seven battalions policing the Sorocaba metropolitan region in São Paulo with a total of 5,000 soldiers, has explicitly endorsed the calls for soldiers to attend the demonstration.

In extraordinary remarks a day after relieving Lacerda of his command, São Paulo Governor João Doria of the Brazilian Social Democracy Party (PSDB), warned a meeting of 24 governors of the “danger of Bolsonaro loyalist infiltration” of Military Police

battalions, stressing that his government's intelligence branch was seeing the growth of movements proposing to "put governors against the wall."

Doria's talk of "infiltration" is an almost delusional understatement. Soldiers with Brazil's 27 state-controlled Military Police corps are widely known to overwhelmingly support Bolsonaro. Created by the 1964-1985 dictatorship, the PMs have 500,000 soldiers in their ranks and their own military justice system, through which soldiers routinely escape punishment for the 6,000 yearly deaths at their hands. The PMs are headed by governors in peace time, but immediately transferred to the army chain of command in case of war or a state of siege. With their daily practice of murder and torture throughout Brazil, the PMs constitute the most fertile breeding ground for Bolsonaro's fascistic agitation.

His hopeless appeals for governors to root out "infiltrators" exposes both the extraordinary crisis facing Brazilian capitalism and the fecklessness of the bourgeois opposition, led by the PT, which had Doria's PSDB as a traditional right-wing opponent before the rise of Bolsonaro.

Bolsonaro is haunted by multiple corruption scandals, tying his family to money laundering, the Rio de Janeiro crime underworld and a multibillion-dollar kickback scheme within the Health Ministry in the purchase of COVID-19 vaccines.

At the same time, the 2022 elections will be held under the shadow of what the army has already termed a "social bomb" of rising unemployment, poverty, inflation and an uncontrolled pandemic that has inflicted, so far, 20 million cases and 577,000 official COVID-19 deaths. The containment of such a "social bomb," for which the ruling class has no progressive solution, is the objective root of the authoritarian drift of the Brazilian political system as a whole, of which Bolsonaro's ultimate rise and coup preparations are the most advanced expression.

Under such conditions, the bourgeois opposition, even facing the threat of being itself "put against the wall," as stated by Doria, places its entire hopes at the hands of the military command. On Sunday, two days after the action against Moraes, the conservative *Estado de S. Paulo* ran as its main headline "Five former presidents consult with generals about coup threats."

In the report, the newspaper's military correspondent Marcelo Godoy recounted the frenzied palace intrigue behind endless declarations in the press that "there will be no coup" in 2022. In fact, such reassurances are belied by the fact that not a week goes by without a newspaper headline recounting a given governor, judge or reporter being informed by "unnamed" generals, once again, that democracy is safe.

The real meaning of these "democratic reassurances" can be grasped from the candid remarks of Senator Alessandro Vieira, who is a member of the Senate's inquiry commission (CPI) on Bolsonaro's handling of the pandemic, on August 17. Vieira told *El País* about Bolsonaro's former chief-of-staff and now Defense Minister Gen. Walter Braga Netto: "[I]t is clear that if we are a serious country, we need him to testify." That was not possible, he said, because "senators fear an armed reaction," concluding "when you get to this point, maybe you don't have a democracy anymore."

As Vieira was interviewed by *El País*, Braga Netto was speaking to a joint session of the Senate's Finance, Defense and Administration committees, where he denied that the military had imposed a dictatorship through the US-backed coup of 1964. He continued with a barely veiled threat against the senators, "[I]f we had had a dictatorship, many wouldn't be here, executions" would have taken place. Before his presidency, Bolsonaro repeatedly claimed that the military should have "killed 30,000."

Bolsonaro's herd immunity policy was coordinated by senior military officers, with an active duty general at the head of the Health Ministry, for most of the pandemic. While divisions remain high over support for Bolsonaro and growing sections of the political establishment are turning against him, seeing his provocative policies as a liability for Brazilian capitalism, the free rein given to the likes of Braga Netto is a sharp warning of the dangers confronted by workers, whatever Bolsonaro's immediate fate.

Fighting the continued and murderous "herd immunity" policy, the growth of social inequality and the turn of the ruling class towards dictatorship requires a political break with Bolsonaro's bourgeois opposition, including the PT and its pseudo-left allies. In their unbreakable defense of the capitalist profit system, they fear an independent political movement of the working class far more than they fear a new and far bloodier military coup. **World Socialist 29.08.2021**