

Brazil - Bolsonaro is breaking the country: 200,000 dead, unemployment and poverty

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President Jair Bolsonaro's remarks to one of his supporters, saying that "the country is bankrupt" and that there is nothing he can do, have been widely debated. But the public accounts do not confirm what he said, even with a global economic crisis that has been dragging on for several years and the decline in activity during the pandemic. Brazil is not "broken": it has 1.24 trillion reais in the National Treasury (Tesouro Nacional), foreign exchange reserves and a surplus of more than \$50 billion in its trade balance. In other words, even by the ruthless criteria of the "market", the country has resources.

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What is being broken are the lives of Brazilians. Brazil surpassed the tragic figure of 200,000 deaths from Covid-19 on 7 January. The number of cases is increasing in most of the country and there are more than 1,200 deaths per day. Nevertheless, Bolsonaro continues to campaign against the vaccine and does not present an effective vaccination plan, even though more than fifty countries have already begun vaccinating their population.

Historical social debt has worsened during the pandemic. The number of people living in great poverty has increased, a tragedy that will increase with the end of emergency aid, received by 48 million people (on 27 January 2021, with a possible extension until March 2021). The government has been able to restrict access to the PCB [Benefício de Prestação Continuada - for people over 65 who do not have a pension and for people with disabilities; to be obtained, the person's income must be less than a quarter of the minimum wage, which is 230 euros!). Unemployment has increased to 14.6 per cent of the working population and 30 per cent of the workforce is under-employed, i.e. they work fewer hours than they would like. Excluding rent, 66.3 per cent of families were in debt as of December 2020. Life is more difficult, especially for Blacks and people of colour, women, LGBTQI, and workers in the North and North East.

Three measures to save lives and prevent extreme poverty for workers

Brazil is bankrupt for the vast majority of its population. And this is not due to a lack of resources, but to the choices and decisions of this government. Jair Bolsonaro is breaking the country and people's lives, while saving the profits of the banks and big business by transferring our resources and those of the state (which is the policy of Economy Minister Paulo Guedes). There is another, alternative way to avoid this type of bankruptcy.

1 - Ensure vaccination now, free and for everyone, by the SUS (Universal Health Service)

Immunization is the only measure that will protect lives and boost the economy. Brazil is now among the last countries in the world to do this, and it seems that the government couldn't care less. At the same time, health entrepreneurs are taking the opportunity to try to offer a paid vaccine, thus ensuring that people's income decides who will live or die.

2 - Ensure emergency aid for the population until the end of vaccination

It is absurd to stop emergency aid. In December, 36 per cent of beneficiary families had aid as their only source of income. This measure will throw millions of people into poverty.

3 - Prohibition of redundancies during the pandemic period and hiring of the unemployed through a plan of public works

The measures of the government and the National Congress have abolished rights, but have not guaranteed employment and income. It is possible to make progress in the fight against unemployment and at the same time to undertake the work that the country needs to develop its economy, as well as the fight against Covid-19.

Life before profit

Large companies and banks have received all kinds of aid. The result is that, even during the pandemic, the small group of billionaires managed to get richer: they increased their profits by 34 per cent. They did not "break." To save the lives of tens of thousands of people and prevent millions from being thrown into poverty, it is necessary to attack the profits of those living on the top floor. To do this, we must implement:

1) Removing the spending cap (Teto de Gastos, adopted in 2016 under president Michel Temer) in order to free up resources for investments in health, employment and social assistance

The law that freezes public spending is criminal. If it had been in place longer, the SUS would have been even further dismantled and we would have lost more lives as a result of the pandemic. As a result of this cap, the government's discretionary spending in 2021 could decrease by R\$67.8 billion, which analysts say could lead to what they call a shutdown, a general paralysis of public services, due to lack of resources. Jair Bolsonaro and Rodrigo Maia (President of the Chamber of Deputies since July 2016, member of the Democrats) do not disagree on maintaining the spending cap and still want to promote administrative reform, designating civil servants as the enemy.

2) Taxing large fortunes and bankers

Several countries, such as Argentina, Spain and Bolivia, have created laws and taxes on wealth and profits to finance the fight against the pandemic. In Brazil, where the richest one per cent of the country accounts for 28.3 per cent of total income, nothing is happening. According to Unafisco (the Association of National Tax Auditors), the government could raise up to 59.79 billion reais, with a change in the tax system, on profits and dividends. But Bolsonaro prefers to keep the income tax scale intact, by taxing those who earn only 2,000 reais per month (about 300 euros).

(3) Use some of the dollar reserves

According to the Citizen's Debt Audit (Auditoria Cidadã da Dívida), Brazil has 1,836 billion reais of foreign exchange reserves. This "mattress" is used to protect against attacks aimed at lowering the

value of the currency, thus financing the action of speculators and market interest rates, while millions of Brazilians suffer from hunger.

4) Suspend the payment of interest on public debt to major creditors

Interest and amortization of public debt consumed 38.3 per cent of federal spending in 2019, compared with 4.6 per cent for health care. In 2020, in August, this haemorrhage reached 45.7 per cent. Every day, according to the Citizen's Audit, the country spends 4.4 billion reais, without the debt coming to an end. We need to stop payments to bankers and big vulture funds so that the money can be used for emergency social needs.

Bolsonaro out now!

Bolsonaro will not adopt any of these measures. His government combines ongoing attacks on democracy with the implementation of an economic programme to dismantle the state. While he threatens not to acknowledge a possible defeat in the 2022 elections, he pursues a radical programme of counter-reforms and privatizations. His government does not care about the pandemic and even takes the opportunity to pass deregulation in the agricultural field and the forest code, in conjunction with Congress.

In order for the country not to "break" for good and for us not to reach 300,000 deaths (considering only the official figures, notoriously underestimated), it is necessary to remove Bolsonaro from power. "Bolsonaro out!" is urgent. The government has already given every proof that it does not respect laws and attacks people's lives. His comment on the assault by Trumpists on Capitol Hill in the United States shows that he is willing to resort to violence if he does not win the next election. We cannot wait until 2022. We must demand that Rodrigo Maia immediately open impeachment proceedings, based on the popular demand, filed in August, signed by hundreds of entities and ignored by him, as well as by his accomplices.

Left-wing parties, trade unions, social and anti-oppression movements should unite to demand: free vaccination of all those already affiliated with the SUS, an emergency income and a guarantee of employment. It is a question of articulating these demands with "Bolsonaro out!" and with actions of solidarity. It is necessary to make 2021 a year of resistance and unitary action, on the streets - while respecting health standards - against this genocidal government.

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