

Protests force American Museum of Natural History to cancel event with Brazil's Bolsonaro

By Miguel Andrade
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Following the announcement Monday by the American Museum of Natural History of its decision to cancel an event in which the Brazilian-American Chamber of Commerce was to present Jair Bolsonaro with its “Person of the Year” award, a second prominent venue in New York City, Cipriani Hall, has followed suit.

While no details have yet emerged regarding the Cipriani Hall decision, it has certainly stemmed from the strong repudiation of the fascistic Brazilian president generated by the Museum of Natural History staff, which organized protests against the ceremony, with threats of resignation and the organization of an all-out boycott of the museum if it proceeded with the plans.

In its statement announcing the event would be hosted somewhere else, the museum said the decision was taken “in mutual agreement with the Brazilian-American Chamber of Commerce.” It remained silent, however, on the unrest among the staff as well as about its own prior knowledge about the nature of the event.

When protests started, officials first described the event, which was to take place in the museum’s Hall of Ocean Life, as an “external, private” one, and later said it was scheduled “before a specific honoree was secured.” Both allegations were met with skepticism by the protesting staff, one of whom told the *Gothamist*: “It would be hard for me to imagine that they’re not just covering it up now.”

The reaction of scientists and students at the Richard Gilder Graduate School, which is affiliated to the museum, was expressed in an open letter of protest that classified honoring Bolsonaro as against the museum’s goals and values. It urged: “One of the ways that we can protect the future for Brazilian Indigenous populations, scientists, citizens and bioconservation efforts is in the refusing access to our collective institutional home to the fascist president who would see these peoples and efforts actively harmed and destroyed.”

Such reactions are fully justified and extremely

significant, demonstrating once again the growing social opposition to the rise of the far right, as well as to capitalist irrationality in relation to climate change, expressed in this year’s powerful worldwide demonstrations against the inaction of bourgeois governments in the face of the social catastrophe it implies.

The government of Jair Bolsonaro represents the most finished form of such irrationality, having named as its foreign minister the far-right Christian chauvinist Ernesto Araújo, who is not only a climate change denier, but attacks climate science as “a Marxist conspiracy.” Meanwhile, the government has proposed cutting Brazil’s science budget in half.

In barely 100 days, the Bolsonaro government has already allowed the use of dozens of pesticides, including 12 considered highly toxic, suspended 600 million reais (US\$150 million) in environmental recovery projects, named agribusiness lobbyists and moguls to environmental agencies, including the National Forest Service, and both purged and censored two of the country’s main environmental agencies Ibama and ICMBio, whose remaining staff, after dozens of resignations, is prohibited from talking to the press unless it receives the environmental minister’s authorization.

Bolsonaro has also personally intervened in the oversight operations of Ibama, the agency tasked with fighting illegal activities in protected areas and the trafficking of protected animal and plant species, ordering the suspension of the standard practice of destroying machinery used in illegal timber extraction.

Since his election campaign, he has made environmental workers one of the main targets at his rallies, branding them as corrupt and treacherous, serving “foreign interests” in curbing illegal activities in Brazilian forests and indigenous lands. Such attacks have already resulted in an increase in ambushes mounted against them by mercenaries in service of agribusiness moguls.

In the coming months, the government has pledged to propose to Congress the authorization of both mining and agribusiness activities on indigenous lands—including by foreign companies—and a new system of “self declaration” for environmental licenses, which the new Ibama chief, Eduardo Bim, declared would be in line with Bolsonaro’s belief that “you should trust the citizen.” Designed to “speed up” investments, the “self declaration” would be an online form in which the applicant for an environmental license, including companies, would pledge to fulfill environmental requirements and be allowed to begin work, being subjected to inspection only later—if ever—and possibly after irreparable damage has been done.

While protests have been called in the capital of Brasília for next week in reaction to this rampage, Bolsonaro has asked his intelligence chief, Gen. Augusto Heleno, to call out the national guard to block them.

Such attacks, transparently profit-driven, pose serious questions. Both in the US and Brazil, as well as internationally, sections of the bourgeois political establishment have been posing as opponents of the crude fascist language of Bolsonaro, Trump, and other far-right world leaders, being nonetheless responsible for their rise.

It is clear by now that the Museum of Natural History’s billionaire trustees, who include the climate change denier and financier of the extreme right, Rebekah Mercer, have bowed to the protests only to stifle mounting social opposition.

Meanwhile, bourgeois politicians are working day and night to isolate the growing protests against government inaction over climate change from any broader opposition to capitalism. This is the goal of toothless initiatives such as the “Green New Deal” in the US and the Paris Agreements, promoted by the supposed opponents of Bolsonaro, including New York City’s Democratic Mayor Bill de Blasio.

While they publicly distance themselves from Bolsonaro’s—and Trump’s—fascistic diatribes, the sold-out US\$ 30,000 tickets for the canceled gala at the museum expose the real attitude of the ruling class toward these forces, with their promises of even more obscene profits and wealth.

Before feigning opposition to Bolsonaro in New York, this same corporate elite was warmly welcoming, at the Wilson Center in Washington, DC, Bolsonaro’s coup-mongering vice president, Gen. Hamilton Mourão. The invitation to his lecture stated: “The first 100 days of the Bolsonaro administration have been marked by political paralysis, in large part due to the successive crises generated by the President’s own inner circle, if not by himself. Amidst the political noise, Vice President Hamilton Mourão has

emerged as a voice of reason and moderation, capable of providing direction in domestic and foreign affairs alike.”

Mourão’s “reasonability” is supposed to allow for a seamless pursuit of profit by curbing Bolsonaro’s fascist rants that expose the ruling elite for what it is. Days before, the right-wing general’s reputation as the “adult in the room” earned him a standing ovation at MIT’s Brazil Conference. This is a transparent cover-up operation, since in 2016 this same meeting of the wealthy effectively kickstarted Bolsonaro’s far-right campaign by inviting as its main speaker his mentor, the Steve Bannon collaborator and far-right ideologue Olavo de Carvalho.

In the same fashion, the global ruling elite rolled out the red carpet for Bolsonaro in Davos in January, and Chilean officials remained silent about his apologies for the crimes of the fascist dictator Augusto Pinochet before his visit to that country to consolidate the new pro-imperialist PROSUL block.

For their part, officials in the increasingly fascist Israeli government stood silent when, visiting the World Holocaust Remembrance Center, Bolsonaro elevated historical revisionism to the height of state policy by declaring Nazism a left-wing ideology. Barely two weeks after visiting Israel, Bolsonaro told a conference of Evangelical leaders in Brazil—invariably portrayed as the best “friends” of Israel by Netanyahu’s far-right clique—that the crimes of the Holocaust could be “pardoned.”

To fight global warming, it is necessary to take these events with utmost seriousness, and relentlessly denounce the feigned opposition of the likes of the Democrats in the US or the Workers Party (PT) in Brazil.

Above all, it is necessary to turn to the working class, the only international force capable of coordinating the herculean tasks facing humanity.

It also requires a determined break with all of the nominal “left”—including the Green parties the world over—whose hostility to the working class has allowed the emergence of far-right figures who demagogically promise that slashing environmental regulations, bringing back coal mining and allowing more disastrous oil drilling will bring economic relief. And in Brazil, they seek to pit workers against the oppressed indigenous populations.

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