

Renewed push towards authoritarian rule in Brazil after exposures in Car Wash probe

By Miguel Andrade
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The weeks following the *Intercept*'s revelation of collusion between prosecutors and Justice Minister Sérgio Moro, who was the lead judge in the sweeping Car Wash (Lava-Jato) corruption investigation, have further exposed the grave dangers confronting the Brazilian working class.

The furious reaction of President Jair Bolsonaro's right-wing government to the leaks has involved not only deportation threats against the *Intercept*'s editor, Rio de Janeiro-based Glenn Greenwald, but also calls for the imprisonment of journalists reporting on the issue. It has likewise led to the opening of an inquiry by the Moro-headed Federal Police into Greenwald's alleged "collaboration" with Russian intelligence to produce the leaks.

This inquiry's aim is to concoct a Brazilian version of the "Russian interference" hoaxes currently being used throughout Europe and the Americas to justify a crackdown on democratic rights, spearheaded by the persecution of Julian Assange and Chelsea Manning.

Officials have repeatedly claimed that Greenwald and other journalists are "aiding criminals" by publishing Moro's messages, claiming that they were obtained illegally, without providing any substantiation.

The messages obtained by the *Intercept* reveal that Moro, while promoted by the right-wing for "taking on the system" in the exposure of wholesale corruption in Brazilian politics, was doing nothing of the kind.

The massive bribes and kickbacks scandal centered around the Petrobras state-owned oil corporation involved every party and virtually every major Brazilian political figure. Moro systematically instructed the main group of prosecutors in the probe to withhold charges in "70 percent" of the cases, invoking the Latin phrase that "the world will fall, but justice will be done". His concern was that to expose and prosecute the full extent of the rot could bring down the entire bourgeois political system in Brazil.

On the other hand, in his most prominent case, the charging of former PT president Luis Inacio Lula da Silva over the so-called "triplex scandal", Moro instructed the prosecution as to how better pursue the case, even producing prosecution witnesses. The *Intercept* has announced that it will produce an extensive series of reports on the cache of documents.

Moro sentenced Lula to nine-and-a-half years in prison in 2017, and, with his sentence confirmed by Brazil's 4th appeals circuit court (TRF-4) in January 2018, the former PT president was barred from running for a third term in the 2018 general elections, under the so-called "clean slate" (ficha limpa) law. Signed by Lula himself in 2010, this law bars politicians whose convictions on corruption charges are upheld by an appeals court from running in elections for

eight years.

However, Lula's attorneys consider that the revelations may prove enough for the Supreme Court (STF) to annul his sentence, or at least grant his Habeas Corpus petition presented in December. After Moro's acceptance of his position in Bolsonaro's cabinet, Lula's lawyers have argued that he was disqualified from judging the case due to political bias.

This hope has been fueled by a wide embrace of the authenticity of the revelations on the part of large sections of the bourgeois establishment. Senate president Davi Alcolumbre from the Democrats party—DEM, one of the successors of the 1964-1985 military dictatorship's ruling ARENA party—declared that, if Moro had been a congressman, he "would already have been stripped of his term and jailed."

Also significantly, two major backers of Bolsonaro's brutal austerity agenda in the corporate press have joined the *Intercept* in reporting on the messages, thus endorsing their implications: Brazil's largest daily, *Folha de S. Paulo*, and the ultra-right *Veja* magazine, the main mouthpiece of the former right-wing opposition to the PT.

The revelations also motivated Supreme Court Judge Gilmar Mendes, who had withdrawn Lula's habeas corpus petition for review in December, to bring it up for a vote by the STF's second panel on Tuesday. He then proposed to again postpone the vote while the authenticity of the messages is investigated—an unlikely scenario to say the least, given that the Federal Police are currently engaged in persecuting Greenwald. He also proposed that Lula be freed while waiting for the probe into the authenticity of the messages, but the proposal was rejected by the panel.

These seemingly tumultuous events reflect deepening divisions within the Brazilian ruling class regarding all the issues that motivated its abandonment of the Workers Party (PT), the preferred party of rule for 13 years, and embrace the fascistic Bolsonaro.

Such conflicts, which have their source in worst economic crisis in the country's history, center around considerations within ruling circles as to the political usefulness of Lula and the PT. They also underlie the reactionary charade facing Brazilian workers with the continued attempt to corral their growing movement of opposition to Bolsonaro behind the PT. This is being waged particularly under banner of a "free Lula" campaign, which has been whipped into a frenzy following the *Intercept* revelations.

One is obliged to ask: what is the "free Lula" campaign all about?

Lula was convicted by Moro of having received a so-called "triplex" beachfront penthouse from the OAS construction giant in exchange for aid in securing contracts with Petrobras, Brazil's state-run oil company. This was the first verdict to be handed down in

10 corruption cases against the former president.

The challenge to Lula's conviction revolve largely around procedural questions. These include Moro's consideration of pending corruption cases in making his decision, in particular one involving a country estate used by Lula, where the evidence was more damning. Also raised was Moro's failure to explain the connection between the amount of bribes cited in the case—87 million reais in total—and the value of the triplex—3.7 million reais—and the fact that the OAS bribes were not specifically related to the Petrobras investigation, meaning that they should have gone to another judge.

At the same time, Lula's defenders have raised Moro's 2016 actions, before Lula was formally charged, in twice intervening in the trumped-up impeachment of Lula's successor, Dilma Rousseff, which already have demonstrated his political bias in the case.

The "free Lula" campaign cannot sustain itself by simply claiming Lula is "innocent". The criminal schemes uncovered by the Car Wash probe skim only the surface of the deep going corruption under the PT's pro-capitalist rule.

The claim is made that the "free Lula" campaign is a struggle for democratic rights. Yet, the governments of Lula and Rousseff were responsible for far-reaching attacks on the democratic rights of the working class, including through the vast expansion of mass incarceration under Lula's "war on drugs".

The *Intercept* revelations are a further exposure of the undeniable—and longstanding—authoritarian character of the Brazilian justice system, which currently is holding 300,000 Brazilians—40 percent of inmates—who are rotting in its dungeons without having even been charged.

Such barbarism is bitterly opposed by Brazilian workers, who rose up in 2013 under the PT government against, among other things, police violence and mass incarceration. At the time—just as now—the PT charged the demonstrators as accomplices to a right-wing conspiracy. As time passed, it only deepened such slanders, now treating those past protests as nothing less than the beginning of a pro-imperialist "color revolution."

Given this background, the defense of Brazilian democracy must be clearly ruled out as the true basis of the "free Lula" campaign.

The second argument is that without the right-wing conspiracy of the impeachment—along with Lula's arrest and conviction—he would have been brought back to power on the people's shoulders, resulting in some sort of "restoration" of Brazilian democracy—even if at the degraded state in which the PT left it.

However, the PT hit a brick wall in its attempt to push forward the "free Lula" campaign in the elections and absolutely buried it in the second round, fearing it would further strengthen Bolsonaro. In part, the unpopularity of the demand—and of Lula himself—was bound up with the way in which both the PT and Lula reacted to the impeachment and his being barred from the elections. They did not attempt to mobilize the working class in their defense, but rather embarked on a series of negotiations with their right-wing former allies until the eleventh hour. They didn't then see the PT's ouster as a "coup", but rather as a temporary rift, or an "intramural scrimmage."

As for the role of the right wing, the real question is obviously, who is responsible for allowing the current government to come to power and hatch its conspiracies? After its naming of 70 percent of the Supreme Court justices now endorsing such conspiracies, its proposing and signing the laws that have been used against Lula, its eulogizing of the military chiefs who back the current government and

its allying itself for 12 years with Bolsonaro in congress, the clear answer is Lula's Workers Party itself. The PT's policies led to an inevitable debacle for which Brazilian workers are paying a terrible price.

If the PT was unwilling to rally workers in its defense—with Lula's infamous declaration, amid the impeachment, that the PT didn't want to resist the process in order "not to set fire" to the country—it was because it had nothing to offer for workers to rally around.

Ironically, faced with the debacle of the PT's project, its lifelong backers, who claimed that it was "the largest working class party ever built" and backed Lula's claims that "only Jesus Christ" could beat him in Brazil, have no better answer to such exposures than the claim that the PT is being "singled out"—from other reactionary capitalist parties—for problems that pre-date its rule.

The "free Lula" campaign boils down to an attempt to sabotage any attempt to draw the lessons of the shipwreck of the PT's rule—and in fact that of the whole Latin American "Pink Tide"—and its inability to solve any of the issues facing Brazilian workers, instead creating the conditions for an unprecedented attack on their living standards.

Furthermore, this campaign has as its corollary the relentless slanders against the large sections of working class that are hostile to the PT, portraying them as a barbaric horde having no reason to reject the party other than engaging in a bigoted "backlash" against its rule. Such slanders, the new stock-in-trade of the academic upper-middle classes, is a main justification for pro-censorship measures, including the recently created Congressional Commission of Inquiry into Bolsonaro's alleged use of "fake news" to commit "fraud" in the elections.

The claim that this campaign offers any way forward in the struggle against Bolsonaro must be decisively rejected. It can only serve to divert Brazilian workers from joining with the international working class in fighting back against the worldwide social counterrevolution and the drive to war and dictatorship.

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