

Pandemic intensifies and Bolsonaro seeds death and social despair

The pandemic caused by the new coronavirus (Covid-19) has been spreading dramatically in our country. The data of April 13th is 23,430 cases and 1,328 deaths - 105 deaths in the last 24 hours. In a country of continental dimensions - 26 states, plus the Federal District - the coronavirus has already reached all states and only one of these states has not yet registered deaths.

This scenario has been aggravated by the irresponsible and criminal attitudes of extreme right-wing president Jair Bolsonaro who, since the beginning of the crisis, has been minimizing the severity of the disease. Bolsonaro has stated more than once that the coronavirus is just a simple flu and has been systematically attacking quarantine measurements. Eduardo Bolsonaro, member of the Parliament and son of the president, in addition to the Education Minister, Abraham Weintraub, have blamed the Chinese people and their governments for the current pandemic caused by the new coronavirus. The attacks on the Chinese people were also replicated by dozens of federal and state Parliament members from the support base of the Bolsonaro government and by fake news militias propagators that support the government on social media. Just when we need to import medical supplies from China, the Bolsonaro government creates a diplomatic crisis with our main trading partner.

Bolsonaro's attacks on social isolation policy almost led him to dismiss the current Health Minister - who has done nothing more than followed the guidelines of WHO, the Ministry's own technicians and defended isolation as the only effective measure to fight the pandemic. Bolsonaro, however, withdrew his Health Minister's resignation, when he realized his political isolation. And protests against his government intensified in these moments that followed the first rumors of the Health Minister's resignation. These protests took place both on social networks - a space in which the government has been losing supporters - and also in "banging pots" that since the beginning of the quarantine have become almost daily. Unfortunately, Mandetta's stay only came after the Minister pledged to tune his speech to that of President Bolsonaro.

It is worth remembering that the current Health Minister, Henrique Mandetta, was a hitherto unknown former Parliament member, who was notable for undertaking a scrapping of the Public Health System and for lobbying private health interests. However, Mandetta, as well as governors and mayors - from across the political spectrum - who advocate social isolation, has seen significant gains in popularity.

Bolsonaro, by contrast, has seen his support plummet - a fact attested by various opinion polls.

Bolsonaro, in his crusade in defense of the virus and against the health of Brazilians, has politicized the use of medicines - especially chloroquine and hydroxychloroquine - which, even without definitive clinical studies - would be a miraculous cure for Covid-19 and which could thus justify a resumption of the economy and an end to social isolation. In addition, the owner of the laboratory that produces chloroquine is a well-known militant of Bolsonaro's group.

In reality, Bolsonaro does nothing effective to increase the number of respirators, ICU beds, masks, tests that detect Covid-19 and PPE for health workers. In addition, regional inequalities - which concentrate the majority of infrastructure and health professionals in the richest regions of the country - extreme poverty, urban agglomerations such as the country's large slums and the arrival of winter in the southern hemisphere, are likely to worsen the pandemic even more.

In addition to all these points, Bolsonaro has been betting on delaying emergency aid to workers and the country's productive forces as much as possible. Unlike several countries that have guaranteed jobs and income, Bolsonaro's government insists on measures that will cause severe wage losses. It also ignores effective job protection and went so far as to propose emergency aid of less than US\$40 a month for informal workers - a figure that the National Parliament, with decisive action by the parliamentary opposition to the government and the trade union movement, has increased to about US\$120, up to a value of around US\$240 per family. After the National Parliament approved the emergency aid, the Bolsonaro government took more than a week to start registering these workers - in a process full of failures and that should delay the receipt of the aid even more - in the last days, queues and huge agglomerations of people seeking to validate the registration for aid were seen across the country.

For formal workers, Bolsonaro proposed a workload reduction with a variable wage reduction that can exceed 60% of the worker's income. In addition, Bolsonaro has insisted on his proposals to withdraw labor rights and weaken public funds linked to workers. All these changes to the labor rules have been happening without any social dialogue mechanism. In this way, the Brazilian government once again fails to comply with ILO Convention 154 - which deals with the mandatory consultation of workers in cases of changes in labor legislation.

In the last few days, Bolsonaro's speeches minimizing the severity of the new coronavirus, the easing

of the social exclusion policy by governors and mayors allied with the government, the retreat of the health ministry, the pressure of business aligned with the government and the delay to that emergency aid reaches even those who need it, resulted in a visible easing of social withdrawal: there are more cars on the streets and people on the sidewalks and in the stores of essential products - which may result in an even more significant increase in the number of Covid-19 cases in the coming weeks. If on the issue of climate denialism, Bolsonaro has the company of several other extreme right leaders of the world, in the case of the denialists of the new coronavirus, Bolsonaro takes off for the macabre position of "global leadership". CUT Brazil fights and defends that job stability is guaranteed for all workers; in addition to maintaining 100% of wages to guarantee purchasing power, and adequate resources for families to go through this crisis. Thus, while Bolsonaro lies and misinforms, putting the Brazilian population at risk of contagion with the new coronavirus, CUT Brazil and its trade unions struggle to ensure that workers can stay at home to contain the spread of the disease.

Central Única dos Trabalhadores - CUT BRAZIL