



# How "Trumpism" and Big Money Poisoned Brazil

President Jair Bolsonaro discusses economic cooperation between Brazil and the U.S.. -Photo: Alan Santos/PR

by Tarcisio Beal

Sadly enough, **the assault on the Brazilian Congress and White House this past January 8 was a carbon copy of the terrorist attack on the U. S. Capitol.** Both were tied to the refusal to accept an electoral defeat and were preceded and followed by an avalanche of lies, distortions, and false accusations by the parties in power, propagators of undemocratic, authoritarian, and Nazi-Fascist ideologies against the defenders of democracy, that is, of the will of the majority of the people. **The pro-Bolsonaro crowd**, claiming the election of **Luís Inácio Lula da Silva** had been stolen, **stormed the center of the government in Brasília**, causing serious damage to the offices and attacking the Security police. In the end, 170 rioters were arrested; 52 of them had been transported to Brasília by 7 seven different traveling companies, three from faraway States of Tocantins and Paraná. The invaders' move was most probably facilitated by one of the Security guards; they broke and piled dozens of chair in the Chamber of Deputies, the Senate, the Supreme Court, and the Presidential Palace. In contrast with Trump's presence in the White House and even his willingness to join the attacking crowd of January 6, Brazil's newly-elected President, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, was 500 miles away meeting with poor and needed citizens.

Elected in 2019, Bolsonaro's archconservative government copied the tactics of the former military dictatorship (1962-1998), with the blessings of Trump, repeating the brutal tactics of the military government of decades earlier and backed up by a conservative, right-wing crowd and by the major newspapers of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. While Bolsonaro received strong support from most of the evangelical churches, his critics and opponents were called subversives, Marxists, and Socialists, just like what the "Trumpists" have been doing in the US. During the last campaign, pro-Bolsonaro newspapers even published the false news that the supporters of Lula da Silva were attacking Catholic churches and institutions. **By contrast**, while in the US the Catholic Bishops Conference, led by conservatives and even by critics of Pope Francis, stayed silent or even supported "Trumpist" positions and lies, in Brazil the National Conference of Bishops, following the example of Cardinal Arns and of Dom Hélder Câmara, were constant critics of Bolsonaro's autocracy and stood firmly on the side of the poor and the persecuted.

Already before the election, Bolsonaro had made plans to absolutely refuse to accept defeat. In conversations with dozens of foreign Ambassadors, he manifested his distrust for the personnel that supervised the electoral system, to the point of stating that if he was not reelected by 60% of the vote, then something was wrong with the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE). Not surprisingly, after the terrorist attack against the Brazilian Congress and the presidential Palace, the police found the notes of a decree being prepared by Bolsonaro's Minister of Justice Anderson Torres with instructions to install tight security within the Supreme Court in order to insure that the results of the 2022 election could be changed by decree. Actually, on January 2, in order to make sure that Bolsonaro would end up reelected, Torres was made Public Safety Secretary by Ibaneis Rocha, the Governor of the Federal District.

Since Bolsonaro's disgraceful presidency was connected with Trump's and the GOP control of the United States by the ideology of persons like Steve Bannon, the similarities kept multiplying. Just like President **Donald J. Trump** was elected after a campaign fueled by billionaires and by voters who bought the lies and distortions thrown against his opponents, so was Brazil's **Jair Bolsonaro's** campaign for a second term. He was supported by the big media and big money in his constant distortion of the truth and of the facts about his opponent **Lula da Silva**, a former President who had greatly improved the socio-economic conditions of Brazil and its stand in the world. Lula's two terms as President lifted tens of millions of Brazilians out of poverty, receiving strong support from the Brazilian episcopate and clergy.

As we know, the Amazon forest, by far the largest of the planet, plays a central role in the conditions of the world's climate. In the last decades, and especially during Bolsonaro's presidency, deforestation greatly increased in that part of Northern Brazil despite heavy criticism from Brazil's bishops and from European Heads of State, but none from American top officials. I have personally seen what was already going on in the 1980s and 1990s and how it worsened the conditions of the poor and homeless who struggled to acquire a place to live in the vastness of public, unoccupied lands. Their efforts were impeded mostly by the big land corporations which carried out deforestation without government opposition. Among these corporations were that of the **American billionaire Daniel Ludwig, Coca-Cola, the Sharp Industries**, and others. By the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century,



**Volkswagen Industries** alone had already cut down 75 million trees in an indigenous area of 23,000 acres; by the beginning of the 21st century, the Amazon had lost 275 million trees. These and other big landowners, like **Liquid Gas**, have continued to gobble up the public lands, with the inaction of the state authorities. However, **Sister Helena stood in their way**.

Let me explain: It is well-known that from the early 1960s to the middle 1990s, Brazil was ruled by a **military dictatorship that received strong support from the CIA** and that targeted the country's new Church born out of Vatican II. Between 1968 and 1998, I traveled to Brazil to visit my family and to see *in loco* the working and the fruits of Vatican II and liberation theology, especially in the Amazon area and in São Paulo, the world's largest metropolis. Here the head of the Catholic Church was **Cardinal Paulo E. Arns**, my former mentor and professor of theology. During the 1970s and 1980s, Arns became the major target of the military dictatorship because of his staunch defense of the poor and persecuted. On December 13, 1987, I had the pleasure of interviewing São Paulo's Cardinal Paulo E. Arns in his own residence, and arranged for future meetings with my university students. Then in 1989, 1991, 1993, and 1994, I took some 45 students, including a couple of priests, in a tour of the Amazon to see *in loco* the building of the **CEBs** (*Comunidades Eclesiais de Base* – Base Ecclesial Communities) in the Amazon, then to São Paulo and Iguassú Falls. The CEBs, fruits of Vatican II and of Liberation Theology, emphasize the preferential option for the poor.

In Manaus, capital of the State of Amazon, we were led on a tour of the whole area by **Helena Augusta Wallcott**, a Sister of the Congregation of the Most Precious Blood. She was creating CEBs and housing for more than 250,000 of the poor and homeless of Central Amazon. One day we were returning from one of the new communities and suddenly were called to witness how one big landowner was expelling the tenants from the land that had been ceded by the State to Sister Helena's organization and burning everything down. As we approached the place, I went over to one of the *pistoleiros* (hired gunmen) carrying out the destruction and said: "Man, how can you do such a thing?" – His answer: "Sorry, man! I am doing nothing more than carrying orders from above!" No surprise, then, that Sister Helena herself was a major target of the *pistoleiros* who worked for the big land corporations. A month earlier she was the target of a *pistoleiro* who, fortunately, missed his target, but still killed one of Sister Helena's assistants standing next to her.

Human rights and the socio-economic conditions of the majority of Brazilians deteriorated during Bolsonaro's right-wing presidency. In a document of 72 pages, the **ONG Human**

Brazil's 2022 Presidential winner Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva (left) campaigned in Porto Alegre with his wife Janja Lula da Silva (right) and Vice President-elect Geraldo Alckim (middle). (Photo: Thyase Ribeiro, Flickr; Midia NINJA, CC BY NC 2.0)



Sister Helena Augusta Wallcott, 87 years old, a nun who became known in Manaus for her social struggle and leader of land occupations, for the right to housing, occupying illegal areas of the Union, passed away June 13, 2022.

**Rights Organization** outlines his undemocratic and authoritarian government that worsened the conditions of human rights in Brazil by neglecting the increasing lack of food for a large portion of the population; by contributing to the destruction of the environment, especially through the support of deforestation in the Amazon and the destruction of indigenous villages by the large corporations, especially in the region of Pará and Maranhão; by favoring greater restrictions on sexual, anti-abortion, and anti-LGBTQ rights; by doing nothing to lessen the inequality between the minority of the rich and the large majority of the poor; and by facilitating a surge of racism in a country where the larger portion of the population is of mixed blood.

As we can see, the similarities between "Trumpism" and "Bolsonarism" are multiple and have been greatly highlighted by the terrorist assaults on Capitol Hill and on the Brazilian Congress and Supreme Court. There is plenty of evidence that Trump viewed **Bolsonaro** as one of his kind and supported him and his government, including the criminal deforestation of the Amazon by the big land corporations. Indigenous lands and their people have been destroyed along with hundreds of millions of trees that play a central role in the regulation of the world's climate. Now, with Bolsonaro, the "**Tropical Trump**," out of the country (imitating Trump, he refused to attend Lula's inauguration) living in the Florida of Governor Ron de Santis, the prospects for the shaping of a truly democratic Brazil are much stronger. President Joe Biden, democrat Senate Majority leader Chuck Schumer and other prominent democrats, plus Frances' Emmanuel Macron and Heads of State across the world have hailed the election of Brazil's Lula da Silva and pledged their support. In the United

States, however, the big question that remains is: "How long will "Trumpism" continue to dominate and ruin the Republican party and the nation?" Fortunately, there are signs that even the Republican Party might come to its senses.

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