

The banning of X/Twitter in Brazil and the authoritarian drive of the capitalist state

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In an unprecedented political move, Brazilian Supreme Court (STF) judge Alexandre de Moraes announced a week ago the indefinite suspension of X/Twitter throughout Brazil. Overnight, millions of people found themselves blocked from one of their main sources of information and communication with an international audience.

The decision was the product of an escalating dispute between the STF and X's fascistic CEO, Elon Musk. In April, X became the target of the "inquiry into digital militias and fake news" conducted by the STF, which demanded that the platform remove the user accounts of individuals accused of involvement in the coup attempt promoted by former president Jair Bolsonaro and high-ranking figures in the Armed Forces.

After refusing to comply with the court's orders, in mid-August X fired all its employees and closed down its activities in Brazil. Thus, the company deliberately removed itself from any legal representation through which it could be summoned under Brazilian law.

The STF responded by ordering, via a post on its official X account, that the company appoint an official representative and, if not, that internet providers in the country immediately block access to the site.

Without any prior warning, people who use X to access news, share information and organize meetings and events found the site inaccessible. On Monday, the five judges of the STF unanimously supported Moraes' decision.

The suspension imposed by the STF is an act of mass censorship unprecedented in Brazil since the end of the 1964-85 dictatorial regime. X is one of the most popular platforms in the country. According to Datareportal, at the beginning of 2024 there were 22.1 million X users in the country.

The sinister implication of the Supreme Court's decision was pointed out in a comment by *UOL* columnist Josias de Souza: "If these networks, like Bluesky, start to host messages on their platform that the Supreme Court considers to be coup-plotting, offensive to the democratic rule of law, then we will reach the same point." In other words, the

decision sets a grave precedent for the suppression of all social media.

The suspension of X/Twitter is just the newest stage in an advanced campaign by the Brazilian state to censor the internet. Fraudulently presented as a means of defending "democracy" and fighting the rise of fascism, the censorship mechanisms being forged with the support of the Workers Party government and its pseudo-left satellites are essentially aimed against the working class.

Over the last five years, the STF led by Moraes has consistently advanced its restrictive measures against social media, claiming that they "have been instrumentalized to attack democracy, to attack the rule of law," as the minister stated in a recent lecture at Mackenzie University.

Moraes, revered by President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and bourgeois public opinion as the "savior of democracy" in Brazil, actually has a consistently reactionary record linked to the state repressive apparatus.

Between 2015 and 2016, Moraes held the post of São Paulo's public security secretary under current vice-president Geraldo Alckmin, then of the Brazilian Democracy Party (PSDB), overseeing the murderous actions of the state's military police and an upsurge in repression of social protests.

Moraes' authoritarian profile led to his installation as Minister of Justice in 2016, when vice-president Michel Temer took power following the impeachment of PT's Dilma Rousseff based on trumped-up charges. The following year, Moraes was appointed by Temer to the Supreme Court.

In 2019, Moraes became the rapporteur of the STF's infamous "fake news inquiry," an investigation conducted behind closed doors and marked by the use of unconstitutional methods. Throughout the Bolsonaro administration and the explosive presidential elections of 2022, the STF inquiry and the figure of Moraes have taken on increasing centrality in the Brazilian political arena.

The same sections of the bourgeoisie that rallied around Lula's candidacy have entrusted immense powers in

Moraes' hands. Although they were initially employed against Bolsonaro's political allies, who actively planned a coup d'état, Moraes' authoritarian measures have gone much further.

Individuals and political groups were targeted by the "fake news inquiry" simply for expressing criticism of the Brazilian state, which was absurdly equated with plotting a coup. In June 2022, Moraes ordered the blocking of all the accounts of the Workers' Cause Party (PCO) after the party criticized the anti-democratic nature of the STF.

The authoritarian escalation of the Brazilian state under the figure of Moraes was not only accepted, but fervently encouraged by the pseudo-left, particularly the Socialism and Freedom Party (PSOL). In 2018, during the elections in which Bolsonaro was victorious, the PSOL demanded that the STF block WhatsApp (the most widely used messaging app in Brazil) under the pretext of curbing the spread of "fake news."

By blaming social media for the rise of fascism, the pseudo-left glosses over the responsibility of its own treacherous policies, as well as the fundamental roots of this process in the crisis of the capitalist system. This reactionary and fraudulent narrative was amplified after the attempted fascist coup of January 8, 2023.

These very arguments marked the conduct of the PT and PSOL-led Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry into the events of January 8 in Brasilia. The commission's report, despite concluding that the former president and a significant part of the military command used the state apparatus to prepare a violent abolition of the democratic system, attributed the main responsibility to the "state of the Brazilian digital ecosystem."

The recent suspension of Twitter/X was also celebrated by these pseudo-left forces. PSOL's most prominent leader and current candidate for mayor of São Paulo, Guilherme Boulos, declared: "Brazil is not a lawless land. I was in favor, from the beginning, as a federal deputy, of the Fake News bill." Boulos added: "A big corporation, a big tech company, especially one presided over by a far-right lunatic like Elon Musk, is not above Brazilian law. The law has been complied with."

President Lula made similar comments, saying: "This citizen is a US citizen, not a citizen of the world. He can't keep offending presidents, deputies, the Senate, the House of Representatives and the Supreme Court." He concluded: "This country doesn't have a society with a 'mongrel complex'. This guy has to accept the rules of this country."

Musk's interventions in the politics of different countries, using his fortune and control over powerful media outlets, are in fact absolutely reactionary.

Defending the interests of the financial oligarchy and US

imperialism, Musk has systematically promoted the growth of far-right political forces around the world, including across Latin America, forging close relations with the likes of Bolsonaro and Argentina's current fascist President Javier Milei. He has not restrained from censoring political opposition on X, as in the notorious case of the defenders of Palestine.

But while Lula and Boulos attack Musk with reactionary arguments based on "national sovereignty" and "law and order," they obscure the real anti-democratic factor of the billionaire's political actions: the fact that, under capitalism, the fundamental communication tools of the international society are under the control of their individual owners.

The defense of the decomposing capitalist state and its authoritarian actions by Lula and the pseudo-left is what gives the extreme right the opportunity to fraudulently present themselves as defenders of "freedom of expression."

Their role in facilitating the growth of the fascist forces was graphically exposed in this latest episode. Although X had been under STF sanctions since April, the timing of its suspension was largely chosen by Musk himself (by closing the company's offices) on the basis of political calculations. Its repercussions are directly being used to promote a demonstration called by Bolsonaro for September 7, Brazil's Independence Day, under the banner of defending "freedom of expression."

The political developments in Brazil strongly vindicate the perspective presented by the *World Socialist Web Site* in its 2024 New Year's statement:

All talk about defending democracy and fighting fascism while ignoring the fundamental question of class and economic power—and, therefore, recognizing the necessity for the mobilization of the working class on a global scale for the overthrow of capitalism—is cynical and politically impotent demagoguery.



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