

# A carnival of reaction: G20 meets for summit in Rio

Alex Lantier

19 November 2024

Rio de Janeiro was on lockdown yesterday, as heads of state of the world's 20 largest economic powers arrived for this year's G20 summit. Streets were deserted after Brazilian President Luis Inácio Lula de Silva declared a two-day public holiday to encourage Rio residents to leave and sent 25,000 troops into the city. Warships patrolled Copacabana and Ipanema beaches, and armored cars ringed the summit venue, Rio's Museum of Modern Art.

The G20 summit was founded in 1999 after the Southeast Asian financial crisis and began meeting yearly after the 2008 Wall Street crash, with a mandate to solve world problems through international economic cooperation. Today, however, there is no cooperation on offer, except on plans for military escalation and attacks on the working class.

An air of utter pessimism and disorientation prevailed inside the G20 summit, amid the Gaza genocide and the re-election of fascist billionaire Donald Trump as US president. A global breakdown of the capitalist system is unfolding, as the pretense that the social needs of the world's working people can be addressed by capitalist governments dedicated to war and the profits of the financial oligarchy collapses.

"I observe with sadness that the world is worse. We have the highest number of armed conflicts since World War II and the largest number of forced displacements ever recorded," Lula said in his remarks opening the summit, pointing to the world's 120 million refugees. But Lula's agenda for the summit—the fight against hunger, global governance reform and green development—did not include any point on stopping wars, genocide or refugee crises.

European officials dismissed Lula's agenda, saying it would not survive once Trump, whose transition team has threatened to pull out of the Paris climate accords and the United Nations, takes office. "We're all supposed to sit there and talk about the future of global co-operation and pretend that there's not [Trump] on his way who couldn't care less," one told the *Financial Times*. "It's hard to see how anything decided [at Rio] has much of a future."

Trump's re-election itself is, however, only the filthiest

expression of imperialism's brutal restructuring of world capitalism in the interests of the financial oligarchy, using war, genocide, police-state reaction and a relentless intensification of the exploitation of the working class.

The leading representative of imperialist barbarism at the Rio summit is America's senile president, Joe Biden, who has just been repudiated at the polls. Only a few weeks ago, Biden and the Democratic Party had been warning that Trump is a fascist planning to impose a dictatorship.

In his remarks at the summit, Biden muttered that "we've made good progress" to procure resources "to address challenges by pandemics and climate change," under conditions in which governments around the world, led by the US, have let the COVID-19 pandemic spread unchecked, gutted programs for preventing future pandemics and abandoned their climate change commitments.

The American president pledged to address "food insecurity" under conditions in which his government is enabling the deliberate starvation of the population of Gaza. Biden reiterated his support for the genocide by declaring that Israel has the "right to defend itself."

Biden added that he "strongly supports Ukraine" in the war with Russia and demanded the G20 do the same. The day before, Biden had authorized Ukraine to use US missiles, and targeting data provided by the US military, for long-range strikes into Russia. He defied earlier warnings from Russian officials that this would mean NATO going to war with Russia and could trigger a nuclear conflict, as well as polls showing that 9 in 10 people in North America and Western Europe oppose military escalation against Russia.

Diplomats also watched Argentina's far-right President Javier Milei, who went to see Trump at his Mar-a-Lago mansion before arriving in Rio, to guess what policies Trump might adopt. Trump called Milei's savage austerity policies a model for the staggering \$2 trillion in budget cuts that billionaire Elon Musk is going to impose as part of his administration. Yesterday, Milei, a supporter of the NATO-backed regime in Ukraine, provocatively stated that he opposes policies to reduce hunger.

European governments are, like Biden, keeping silent on Trump's threats to set up a dictatorship and his remarks that this presidential election might be America's last. They are using the massive shift to the right to help them impose tens of billions of euros in unpopular social cuts to divert funds to the "war economy." While France's "president of the rich" Emmanuel Macron met Milei for talks, UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer demanded that the G20 "double down" in support of Ukraine, and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said: "Ukraine can count on us."

Like Washington, Europe's unpopular governments are escalating war with utter contempt for working class opinion. Polls have found that only 3 percent of the German population support Scholz's coalition government, and only 5 percent of the French population support Macron. As for Starmer, he has suffered a staggering 49 percent collapse in opinion polls since his election this summer.

The heads of state from outside the imperialist centers do not present any alternative. The advocates of a "multi-polar world" seek little more than some breathing space for their own national, capitalist interests, faced with the imperialist powers' threats to escalate trade war and military conflict, amid a mortal crisis of the entire capitalist system. Russian President Vladimir Putin could not attend for fear of arrest due to his invasion of Ukraine two years ago, and the Kremlin was represented by Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov.

Chinese President Xi Jinping arrived in Rio as Trump threatens to strangle China's economy and keep it from overtaking the US economy by cutting off access to US markets with massive tariffs. Xi reacted by calling for the G20 to honor principles of "mutual respect, equal-footed cooperation and mutual benefit and support Global South countries." He also touted China's \$1 trillion global infrastructure investment program, the Belt and Road Initiative, even as Chinese economic growth falls to under 5 percent.

Xi, however, is pursuing the regime's capitalist interests, not an anti-colonial struggle appealing to mass opposition to imperialism among workers internationally. This emerged when European officials, fearing Trump's threats of a devastating cut-off of their own access to US markets, sought out talks with Xi. When Starmer pledged to be "predictable" and build a "strong UK-China relationship," Xi hailed Starmer's anti-worker austerity measures and war plotting for supposedly "working to fix the foundations of the economy" in Britain.

Yesterday, amid reports that India's Hindu-chauvinist Prime Minister Narendra Modi hopes for close relations with Trump, Modi met Italy's fascist Premier Georgia Meloni. Modi signed a joint statement with Meloni, who is cultivating ties with Musk, pledging close collaboration on

economic projects and in global diplomatic forums.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan arrived in Rio and praised Lula's "stance against Israeli aggression," referring to Lula's statement that Israel is carrying out a genocide in Gaza. This is, however, a cynical attempt to cover up Erdogan's own role. Indeed, he has kept providing Israel with oil and gas throughout the genocide, thus helping the NATO imperialist powers arm Israeli forces as they massacred tens of thousands of defenseless civilians.

Amid this wave of reaction, Lula has made one proposal that is good for a laugh: a call for a 2 percent wealth tax on billionaires in the G20 countries. Perhaps the Brazilian maestro of leftish demagoguery imagined that this r-r-r-revolutionary demand would astonish the world with its boldness and have Elon Musk gasping for air! But the proposal was vetoed by US and British officials and abandoned. This pathetic event simply reveals how the capitalist system cannot be reformed.

The reactionary, thoroughly unpopular maneuvers of the various corporate-controlled politicians in Rio expose the dead end of the capitalist system. The contradictions that the great Marxists identified as leading to world war in the 20th century—between world economy and the nation-state system, and socialized production versus private appropriation of profit—are again leading it into a mortal crisis. Amid a bitter struggle over control of the world economy, it is sinking ever deeper into world war, genocide, and fascist reaction against the working class.

An immense class confrontation is inevitable between the capitalist governments and the billions-strong international working class created over decades of economic globalization. But workers will find no way to stop the deepening global war, genocide, fascism, climate change and social collapse outside of the revolutionary overthrow of the entire system. The necessary economic resources to address urgent social needs must be taken out of the hands of the capitalist oligarchs and illegitimate capitalist governments and coordinated internationally in a struggle for socialism.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**