

Update from the Trenches in Brazil: “one of the worst crises our country has ever seen”[Clique aqui para ver a notícia no site](#)

Grassroots International received this first-hand account of the current situation in Brazil from Valdenildo (Nildo) Martins de Souza of MST – Pernambuco and received his permission to post it. He gives a powerful and devastating overview and shares about the work that the Brazil's Landless Workers Movement (MST) is doing through Popular Health Agents and food distribution campaigns, which we are proud to support through our grantmaking. The English translation of his message follows.

UPDATE FROM THE TRENCHES IN BRAZIL: “ONE OF THE WORST CRISES OUR COUNTRY HAS EVER SEEN”

Dear comrades at Grassroots International,

We hope you are all well! Before anything, we express our gratitude for the partnership and the pursuit of utopia always on the horizon, renewing in us the mistica of building a new society.

Today, we are undergoing one of the worst crises that the country has ever seen. Nineteen million Brazilians are below the poverty line, with no prospect of emerging. According to research, Brazil is on track to become the country with the 14th highest unemployment rate in the world in 2021, after being in 22nd place last year, and it is expected to rise even more, moving in the opposite direction of the global average. Countries similarly affected by the Covid-19 pandemic since 2020 should recover and experience a drop in the unemployment rate in 2021, as is the case of Colombia, Peru and Mexico, in contrast to Brazil, which is in a deep recession, in addition to its low economic growth of recent years.

This trend indicates that even if there is progress in the immunization of the population – which is increasingly unlikely – the crisis will continue to worsen after the pandemic. In other words, in 2021 and at least for the next two years, the crisis will worsen, resulting in unemployment, hunger and the return of a fragile economy, due mainly to measures adopted by the current federal government, keeping the unemployment rate in Brazil in the double digits for quite a while. On one hand, 38 million Brazilians are understood to have sought the emergency aid of 600 Brazilian reais per month proposed in 2020 by the opposition party and approved by the congress, but in 2021 there was a reduction in the amount of aid (from 600 to 250–375 reais) and the number of families who could qualify for it. More than 22 million families in need were excluded.

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The figures today show Brazil with 27.2 million – 12.8% of its population – in extreme poverty. According to the Getulio Vargas Foundation (FGV), the number of citizens living below the poverty line has tripled, leading families to try to survive on 246 reais (\$43.95) per month. Millions of Brazilians, including peasants striving for agrarian reform, do not even have the “right” to be exploited by capital, as they are made invisible by the State. In short, the working class is severely impacted as it simultaneously suffers from the effects of the social crisis, the increase in unemployment, the health crisis and the proliferation of diseases, the food crisis and environmental devastation, the political crisis and cuts to public policies that save lives, in addition to the growth of social inequalities affecting the whole country.

Part of society has positioned itself as oblivious to these events, treating them as if they were natural and inevitable. The number of deaths from the pandemic no longer impact or are not visible to a portion of society. Social networks and national and foreign media cover news of constantly emerging political scandals, excesses, neglect... In the end, it is as if the population is being instructed not to see or not believe what is happening.

Many have repeated the narrative of denialism, saying that the numbers have been manipulated and don't exist and the politicization of the pandemic is an attempt to overthrow the Bolsonaro regime. These turn into “factoids,” using hate speech, denial of science, and lies known as “fake news” that feed supporters and quickly spread on social networks. This has caused much damage since the pre-election period in 2018.

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In the meantime, for more than 3 weeks, over 3,000 people on average have been killed each day. Mortality rates among patients with COVID-19 are higher among Black and brown people – of whom 55% of those hospitalized with COVID-19 in serious condition have died compared to 34% of white patients. The fact is that activists are losing their lives. Families have been weeping for their loved ones due solely to the negligence of the federal government, which has countered protective measures of state and municipal governments. These measures would have given us hope of not contracting the virus or facing the possibility of going to the hospital and dying due to oxygen shortages.

In the midst of so many deaths and the spread of the pandemic, it would be practically impossible for this not to reach our communities, even though they are far from the cities, with good ventilation, and the numbers aren't as high. It is not common to have large gatherings of people in our settlement areas, and when there are gatherings, they are generally out in the open and thus well ventilated, reducing the risk of infection.

However, we have started to register deaths in our areas. On the weekend of the State General Assembly of the Landless Workers Movement (April 9–10, 2021), we received the news that 12 people died in our areas, leaving families grieving while themselves infected or at risk of infection.

“The Popular Health Agents are providing transportation to vaccination sites when necessary, providing support and guidance, raising awareness about hygiene and prevention measures, and keeping people updated about vaccination schedules and appointments. Meanwhile, the MST continues to carry out food distribution campaigns...”

The Popular Health Agents (PHC), who work directly in the communities, are accompanying these comrades, and through our outreach, people are being vaccinated, based on age groups, under the supervision of PHC. The PHC are providing transportation to vaccination sites when necessary, providing support and guidance, raising awareness about hygiene and prevention measures, and keeping people updated about vaccination schedules and appointments.

Meanwhile, the MST continues to carry out food distribution campaigns, which require energy. On Saturday April 10th, just after our State General Assembly, ten tons of food from the agrarian reform settlements were distributed in the metropolitan region of Recife (in Brasília Teimosa). Food distribution, follow-up and orientation campaigns continue in all regional offices in the State of Pernambuco.

We are fulfilling our main goal, which is to contribute to a stronger and more egalitarian society, where there is no hunger, where those who produce on their land can share part of their production and reach diverse populations, particularly those in cities who do not have access to food. This has always been the proposal of the Landless Workers Movement. This is the people's struggle for hope and unity, to be able to see the true path and objective of mutual support, by supporting above all a project for everyone, regardless of political party, free from personal interests. A political and social project that will spread beyond the structural pandemic of our country, that thinks of the people above all else.

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