

Major Floods in Brazil Displace 581,000 People

news

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The Brazilian state of Rio Grande do Sul (RS) has suffered the worst floods in its history, reaching 5.35 metres and killing 169 people. Another 56 people are missing and 581,000 have been displaced [1]. This beats the previous record of 4.76 metres set in 1941 [2]. The state is prone to heavy seasonal rains. What measures are being taken to deal with this, and why is this year's flood so much worse?

The governor of Rio Grande do Sul, Eduardo Leite of the Brazilian Social Democratic Party (PSDB), who was elected in 2019 and re-elected in 2023, has relaxed environmental laws during his time in office, allowing for the expansion of irrigation systems and dams, with environmentalists' protests having no effect [3]. The agro-industrial monopolies are very powerful in Brazil and continue to expand throughout the country. This has major implications for Brazil and the world, as the country's biodiversity is under constant attack.

Eduardo Leite has also ignored the warnings of experts about heavy rainfall. This has been going on for years [4]. He states:

"You have these studies, they somewhat warn us, but the government also has other issues and agendas."

He has decided that it is easier to deal with the aftermath than to invest in precautionary measures, which would not serve the interests of big agro-industrial monopolies. Now he says that RS needs 19 billion Brazilian Reals to rebuild the destroyed areas, as a kind of Marshall Plan [5]. In reality, it is not "easier" to deal with the aftermath, but more profitable for the biggest monopolies. The capitalists do not see a tragedy, but an opportunity, as now there will be 19 billion Brazilian Reals in state funds up for grabs. As a result, the reconstruction effort will likely be mired in corruption, and extortion and the most profitable ventures will be prioritised, leaving the poorest victims homeless for a long time.

President Lula da Silva of the Workers' Party (PT) has promised to help the country recover from the disaster. Despite pro-worker rhetoric, Lula's government's policy is austerity and this disaster will demonstrate where the government's true priorities lie. However, he has pledged to offer cheaper credit and earlier access to the monthly family support money (Bolsa Família), claiming to be investing 50 billion Brazilian Reals [6]. In reality, most of this money isn't an investment, bringing forward the existing monthly family support payments. This means that families receive their support earlier than usual, but no additional funds are being injected into the program. Not even the RS state debt has been cancelled, although some members of parliament are pushing for this [7].

The hugely popular Lula da Silva is demonstrating the shortcomings of social democracy, if his government can even be called that. Although Eduardo Leite's inaction and capitulation to big business is primarily to blame, Lula's supposedly pro-worker government is incapable of acting as it should because of its subservience to capital. He chooses not to even try to fight back against austerity measures, even in a catastrophic situation like these floods, where he would have massive popular support to do so. He is showing the population the limits of capitalism, and demonstrating himself to be a puppet of capital. No matter which face acts as its representative, or how "democratic" it presents itself to be, while the means of production remain in private hands, the government will inevitably be a dictatorship of the interests of the capitalists.

In addition, these tragedies, which used to be freak occurrences, will only become more frequent with climate change – which is a consequence of production for profit. Only a system where the means of production are commonly owned, and production planned according to a rational and scientific plan, can avert the climate crisis. Only through socialism, where people's lives count, not profits, can tragedies like these, be avoided or at least dealt with in the best possible way.

Sources: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7

Original article