

Brazil's Impeachment and the Fall of the Workers Party

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Thursday's vote by the Brazilian Senate to initiate the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff on trumped-up charges of budgetary improprieties has effectively ended 13 years of rule by the Workers Party (Partido dos Trabalhadores—PT) over Latin America's largest country, with over 200 million inhabitants and the world's seventh largest economy.

The ouster of Rousseff is the outcome of an undemocratic conspiracy organized by decisive layers within the Brazilian ruling class and supported by international finance capital. It has been carried out with the aim of effecting a radical change in economic policy and class relations and poses an immense threat to the jobs, basic rights and living standards of masses of Brazilian workers.

What has been imposed by means of this conspiracy is the most right-wing government since the end of the country's two-decade-long military dictatorship over 30 years ago. Rousseff is supposedly merely suspended from office for the duration of a trial that could last until October. The reality, however, is that under her vice president and erstwhile political ally, Michel Temer of the PMDB (Brazilian Democratic Movement Party), the entire government has been changed. Every minister has been replaced, entire departments are being liquidated and a wholesale purge of state officials is underway.

With his premier speech as "interim president," Temer resurrected the language of authoritarianism and dictatorship. He called for a government of "national salvation" to "pacify" Brazil and invoked the slogan emblazoned on the country's flag, "Ordem e Progresso" (Order and Progress), as the watchwords of the new regime.

An unelected government is preparing to implement what the new finance minister, former Bank of Boston CEO Henrique Meirelles, acknowledged Friday will be "hard" austerity measures designed to impose the full burden of Brazil's economic crisis, the worst in a century, on the backs of the working class. Inevitably, the government will resort to state violence and repression to carry out this agenda.

The economic crisis, which has resulted in 11 million unemployed with no letup in mass layoffs in sight, is at the root of the debacle of the PT government. The economic breakdown that has gripped world capitalism since 2008 has found a sharp expression in Brazil and throughout Latin America in the collapse of the commodities and emerging markets booms that made possible the PT's policies of providing limited social assistance programs for the poor, while creating the most profitable conditions in the country's history for the corporate and financial oligarchy.

The same crisis is undermining all of the bourgeois governments associated with Latin America's so-called turn to the left, from the ousted Peronists in Argentina to Nicolas Maduro, who faces a possible recall election under conditions of an economic meltdown in Venezuela.

The Rousseff government not only failed to carry out measures to ameliorate the conditions of mass unemployment and falling real wages, it initiated its own austerity measures aimed at winning the favor of world financial markets and Wall Street ratings agencies. Social inequality in this starkly polarized country is once again on the rise, and the gains made in reducing extreme poverty over the past decade are evaporating.

While the methods used to remove Rousseff from office are entirely undemocratic, the protests by the president and her supporters that she is the victim of a "coup" ring hollow, given that the collection of corrupt and right-wing capitalist politicians behind the impeachment were, until recently, the PT's closest political allies. They were also partners in a succession of corrupt operations, from the *mensalao* congressional vote-buying affair to the contract kickback scandal at Petrobras. It is perhaps the greatest political indictment of the PT's rule that it served to protect and incubate the reactionary political elements that are now being unleashed upon the working class.

The PT sought to save itself from impeachment by trying, on the one hand, to secure support from these same layers with offers of more positions and power, and, on the other, to convince the ruling establishment that the Workers Party was better equipped to carry through an austerity agenda by dint of its electoral "legitimacy" and its collaboration with the CUT union federation in suppressing working class struggles.

In the end, the PT, a thoroughly venal capitalist party, bears criminal responsibility for the "coup" it condemns, whose principal victims will be not Rousseff and her fellow politicians, but the masses of Brazil's workers and oppressed.

Particular responsibility for the acute crisis now confronting Brazilian workers rests with the various pseudo-left groups that backed the Workers Party and sought to subordinate the working class to its leadership. Chief among them are various revisionist tendencies that split from the International Committee of the Fourth International, rejecting its struggle for the international unity and political independence of the working class based on a revolutionary socialist program in order to adapt themselves to Stalinism and various forms of bourgeois nationalism, chief among them, Castroism.

In Brazil, these forces promoted the Workers Party as a substitute for the building of a revolutionary Marxist party in the working class. The PT was portrayed as providing a new Brazilian parliamentary road to socialism. Its name notwithstanding, the PT was from its founding not a party of the working class, but rather a bourgeois party based on privileged sections of the middle class. Its purpose was to contain the class struggle and the immense social tensions of Brazilian society, while defending capitalism.

While many of these tendencies were thrown out of the PT as it moved ever further to the right under the leadership of former metalworkers union leader Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, they continue to play essentially the same role today, offering not a trace of revolutionary leadership in the face of the impeachment crisis.

The Morenoite PSTU (Unified Socialist Workers Party) continues to advance the slogan

“throw them all out,” essentially adapting to the right-wing conspiracy that produced the impeachment, while failing to provide any warning of the immense dangers confronting Brazilian workers. Having supported imperialist regime-change operations from Syria to Ukraine, it now is complicit in a domestic version of the same process.

The Pabloite tendencies organized around the group Insurgencia are part of PSOL (Socialism and Liberty Party), a party formed by legislators expelled from the PT. Their aim is to refurbish the original PT model in order to better subordinate the working class to the capitalist state.

The period in which these parties have been able to help suppress the class struggle is coming to an end, not only in Brazil, but internationally. As the present crisis demonstrates, the ruling class is no longer able to rule in the old way and it is becoming impossible for the working class to live in the old way, creating the conditions for revolutionary upheavals.

The most urgent political task is the formation of a new revolutionary leadership in the working class based on an assimilation of the bitter experience with the Workers Party and the long struggle of Trotskyism against revisionism. This means building a Brazilian section of the International Committee of the Fourth International.

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