

With Rousseff Ousted, Vice President Assembles Right-Wing Government in Brazil

By [Bill Van Auken](#)

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Michel Temer, the vice president and former political ally of ousted Workers Party (Partido dos Trabalhadores—PT) President Dilma Rousseff, formally took control of Planalto, the presidential offices in Brasilia, Thursday, declaring that his would be a government of “national salvation,” and assembling a cabinet of right-wing politicians and capitalist economists from the banking and financial sector.

With the Brazilian Senate having voted that morning after an all-night session to initiate impeachment proceedings against Rousseff, she was suspended from office for the length of a trial that will likely run into September or October. While only a simple majority vote was required to begin this process, the lopsided result was 55 to 22, more than the two-thirds majority that is ultimately required to permanently remove the PT president from office.

Given that the basis of the impeachment charges—Rousseff’s alleged manipulation of budgetary accounts to cover for temporary shortfalls—was clearly contrived as a pretext, a final conviction appears inevitable.

Brazil is the largest country in Latin America and the seventh largest economy in the world. Rousseff received 54 million votes in 2014 when she was reelected to a second term as president. This election has now been overturned through an anti-democratic political conspiracy at the highest level of the Brazilian ruling elite.

In his first speech to the nation, Temer, surrounded by a coterie of smirking politicians from nearly every party outside of the PT, stressed that his government would work to “improve the environment for investment by the private sector” and carry out “fundamental reforms” designed to shift the burden of the country’s profound economic crisis even more directly onto the backs of the masses of Brazilian workers.

There was more than a whiff of fascism in the new interim president’s remarks. He declared that his goal was to “pacify and unify” Brazil and declared that the watchword of his government would be “*Ordeme Progresso*,” order and progress, the words that appear on Brazil’s flag.

Taken from the French philosopher Auguste Comte, the slogan was first introduced into Brazil’s political lexicon in the late 19th century by leading figures in the military who were influenced by Comte’s positivism. They became a watchword for national unity and suppression of the class struggle, imposed most effectively under the US-backed military dictatorship that ruled the country between 1964 and 1985.

Temer’s remarks suggested that Brazil needed to return to these old “values.” The slogan

on the flag, he declared, “couldn’t be more current than if it were written today.”

Temer told the assembled audience that he had recently driven past a gas station and seen that its owner had put up a sign reading “Don’t talk about the crisis, work.” He added that he wanted to see this slogan spread to “10, 20 million billboards throughout Brazil.” The slogan, he said served to promote “harmony” and “optimism.”

He spoke these words under conditions in which 11 million workers are now unemployed and layoffs have been continuing at the rate of 100,000 a month. The collapse of the commodities boom and the emerging market boom has plunged the country into its deepest economic crisis in a century.

The answer given by Temer to this crisis is clearly one of sharp austerity measures. He bragged that his first actions had been to slash the number of government ministries and indicated that a large-scale elimination of public sector jobs would follow. He also said that his government was committed to “fundamental reforms,” in the first instance in the country’s social security system and its labor laws.

The cabinet assembled by Temer is a collection of reactionaries and pro-business figures. Among the most important figures is Jose Serra, who has been named foreign minister. Serra is a leading figure in the right-wing PSDB (Brazilian Social Democracy Party) who served as a senator, mayor of Sao Paulo and twice as the unsuccessful candidate of the PSDB, losing to the PT in both 2002 and 2010. Serra was named in US embassy cables released by WikiLeaks as favoring the privatization of the state-owned energy giant Petrobras and the opening up of the so-called pre-salt underwater oil fields to exploitation by major oil firms based in the US.

The ministry of education was awarded to Mendonça Filho of the extreme right-wing Democrats (DEM) party, the successor to ARENA, the official ruling party of the former military dictatorship. He is the son of a career ARENA official and major landowner in the northern state of Pernambuco.

The ministry of Institutional Security, which includes Brazil’s intelligence agency, has been placed under the control of the former top general in the Brazilian army, Sérgio Westphalen Etchegoyen. When the general’s father was identified by the country’s truth commission as one of the officials responsible for the murders, disappearances and torture under the dictatorship, he protested angrily, declaring the accusations “frivolous.”

For agriculture minister, Temer named Blairo Maggi, a billionaire agribusiness figure known as the “soy king,” who is credited with doing more to destroy the Amazon rain forest than anyone else on the planet.

And the ministry of justice was handed to Alexandre de Moraes, the Sao Paulo state public safety secretary, who is an advocate of police-state repression. A separate human rights ministry was folded into justice and also placed under his leadership. Earlier, the name of a right-wing female deputy known for her opposition to abortion, including in cases of rape, had been put forward for human rights.

A number of those appointed to the new cabinet are facing corruption charges, including in connection with the massive bribery and kickback scandal involving contracts with Petrobras. Even the daily *O Estado de S. Paulo*, which backed impeachment, was compelled

to observe that the new government's leaders "with the participation of those notably involved in corruption scandals past and present, pretend that they are going to change everything to, in reality, leave everything as it is."

Perhaps the most significant figure in the new cabinet is Henrique Meirelles, who will take the post of finance minister, directing the austerity drive. Social welfare will reportedly be placed under his remit, indicating the government's intention to make radical changes. The role of Meirelles underscores the fundamental continuity between the new right-wing government and the PT administration that preceded it.

A former CEO of Bank of Boston, Meirelles was appointed head of Brazil's central bank when the PT first came into office under the presidency of former metalworkers union leader Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva. His appointment was a signal to both Brazilian and foreign capitalists that they had nothing to fear from the socialist rhetoric of the PT. Lula had proposed that Rousseff bring Meirelles into her administration, even as vice president.

In her own speech delivered Thursday morning, Rousseff denounced the impeachment as a "coup" and insisted that she was guilty of no crime. "It's the most brutal thing that can happen to a human being," she said, "being condemned for a crime you didn't commit. No injustice is more devastating."

She compared the experience to the torture she suffered as a prisoner of the military dictatorship in the late 1960s and her bout with cancer.

While denouncing the attack on herself personally and the threat to democracy posed by the "fraudulent impeachment," she made no attempt to warn the Brazilian working class of the sharp attacks that are to come, much less call for any concrete action by workers against the "coup."

This is because, in the end, the PT was prepared to carry out similar attacks, and had sought to win the support of Brazilian and foreign capital with the argument that only it could be seen as a "legitimate" government, and could utilize the collaboration of the CUT union federation to suppress working class resistance.

Moreover, all of those who have carried out the supposed coup were, until recently, the PT's closest political allies, awarded posts in government, running on common slates and, as emerged in the so-called *mensalao* scandal, even paid handsome stipends to vote with the government in congress.

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Articles by: [Bill Van Auken](#)

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