Rousseff denounces “coup” leaders as impeachment draws nearer

Bill Van Auken
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Brazil’s Workers Party (Partido dos Trabalhadores—PT) President Dilma Rousseff issued a bitter denunciation of her former vice president, Michel Temer, on Tuesday, describing him as a coup supporter and “chief conspirator” against her government.

Her public attack came after the release of a speech recorded by Temer and sent by WhatsApp to the parliamentary members of his party, the PMDB (Brazilian Democratic Movement Party, the largest in the federal legislature). The recording was presented as a rehearsal for the first “pronouncement” he would make to the Brazilian people after a successful impeachment and his ascension to the presidency.

The release of the speech, which Temer and PMDB leaders claim was leaked, came only hours before a special impeachment committee in the lower house of the Brazilian parliament voted 38 to 27 in favor of proceeding to a vote of the full Chamber of Deputies on impeaching Rousseff.

That vote is expected to come by the beginning of next week, with the chamber being called into a rare Sunday session to begin consideration of the charges against the PT president. A two-thirds vote in favor of impeachment is required to send the matter to the Senate, which would make the final decision. During a Senate trial lasting up to 180 days, Rousseff would be suspended with Temer taking her place as interim president.

In his recorded post-impeachment speech, Temer vowed that he would create a “government of national salvation” based upon “national unity” uniting all of the political parties and “all those who are prepared to give their collaboration in getting the country out of crisis.”

He went on to warn, “we are going to have many sacrifices ahead. Without sacrifices, we will not be able to go forward in regaining growth and development …”

He added that his “great mission” would be the “pacification and reunification” of Brazil.

In her angry response to the speech, delivered to an audience that included the pro-PT leaderships of the students and teachers unions, Rousseff declared: “We live in times of a coup, of farce and of betrayal. Now they conspire openly, in the light of day, to destabilize a legitimately elected president. This act reveals the betrayal against me and against democracy, and that chief conspirator has no commitment to the people.”

Insisting that the impeachment charges drawn up against her are “without evidence and without juridical justification,” Rousseff went on to warn that Temer lacks the “legitimacy” to impose a “plan of national salvation” that would require sacrifices from the Brazilian people.

This last point is the crux of bitter divisions within the Brazilian ruling establishment as the impeachment process proceeds toward a decision. Whether Rousseff and the PT are thrown out or whether they stay, Brazil’s financial and corporate oligarchy is determined to carry through sweeping attacks on the living standards and basic rights of the working class, in a drive to make Brazilian capitalism more “competitive” on the world market.

Predominant layers within ruling circles appear to favor impeachment as the best means of effecting radical changes. This finds its reflection in strong gains on the Brazilian stock market with every step closer to Rousseff’s ouster. Others, however, have warned that the collaboration of the PT and the CUT union federation, which is affiliated to the party, will be necessary for suppressing workers’ struggles against the planned counter-reforms.

In this regard, Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, the former

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metalworkers union leader, founder of the PT and Rousseff's predecessor as president, is seen as a pivotal figure.

Lula, as the ex-president is known, has spent much of his recent years traveling the world taking in hundreds of thousands of dollars for delivering speeches on behalf of Brazilian corporations, particularly the construction giant Odebrecht, whose operations are at the center of the ever-widening scandal involving bribes and kickbacks paid in connection with padded contracts with Petrobras, the government-run oil conglomerate.

Himself the subject of charges of corruption in connection with a beach-front apartment allegedly given to him by Petrobras construction contractors, Lula has divided his time in recent days between political horse-trading with right-wing parties in Brasilia in an attempt to win "no" votes on impeachment with promises of political posts and favors, and delivering demagogic speeches to rallies called by the PT and its supporters.

As Monday's vote of the impeachment committee indicated, Lula's efforts in Brasilia have yet to produce the desired results. One of the main parties with which the PT had attempted to curry favor, the grossly misnamed Progressive Party (PP), the fourth largest in the lower house of parliament, voted on Tuesday to break with the PT coalition government, following the example set late last month by the PMDB. Voting for impeachment in the lower house committee was the PP's leading figure Paulo Maluf and two other PP deputies.

That the Rousseff government depended upon the support of a figure like Maluf, who began his political career as a mayor of Sao Paulo appointed by the military dictatorship in1969, and whose name is a synonym for right-wing thuggery and rampant corruption, is indicative of the reactionary policies and bourgeois class character of the PT.

Whatever the course of the impeachment process, Brazil is facing a protracted crisis of bourgeois class rule. Those who are leading the charge against Rousseff, who is presently accused of nothing more than juggling budget accounts to conceal a deficit, are themselves deeply implicated in the corruption that pervades Brazilian politics. Eduardo Cunha, the PMDB head of the lower house of parliament, who is leading the impeachment drive, is charged before Brazil's Supreme Court with accepting millions in kickbacks from Petrobras contracts and hiding the money in secret Swiss bank accounts.

A poll done over the weekend by Datafolha showed 60 percent of Brazilians supporting the ouster of not only Rousseff, but also Temer, the man who would succeed her.

Driving the overwhelming hostility toward every section of the political establishment are not merely the corruption scandals, which are a perennial feature of Brazilian political life, but more fundamentally the impact of the country's most severe economic crisis at least since the Great Depression of the 1930s. Inflation has topped 10.5 percent and unemployment 9.5 percent, with at least 1.3 million workers laid off in the last 12 months. Wages fell in 2015 by 3.2 percent, while social inequality has widened significantly for the first time since 2000. On top of this, the PT government has already begun imposing austerity policies that are sure to escalate sharply, whatever the fate of Rousseff.

While the right-wing parties and the corporate media have succeeded in whipping sections of the middle class into a frenzy of anger against the PT government, the working class has yet to enter into struggle. Both the PT and its affiliated unions are determined to suppress any independent movement of the workers.

The fear of social upheavals is becoming increasingly apparent. The government has called up thousands of troops to support local police in Brasilia, and barricades are being erected in the Brazilian capital in anticipation of violent clashes during the impeachment session early next week.

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