

Brazil's Senate set to vote on impeachment of Rousseff

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The Brazilian Senate appeared set to vote May 11 on the impeachment of Workers Party (*Partido dos Trabalhadores*—PT) President Dilma Rousseff, having dispensed with a brief challenge from the new interim leader of the lower house of congress and in the face of a challenge by the government before the country's Supreme Court.

The Brazilian media is reporting that the Senate leadership has at least 50 to 51 votes in favor of putting Rousseff on trial, far more than the required simple majority of 41 in the 81-member body. The vote will spell Rousseff's immediate suspension from office during proceedings that can last for up to 180 days before the Senate delivers a final vote. A two-thirds majority is required to expel the PT president from office permanently.

Michel Temer, Rousseff's vice president, former ally and current nemesis, has already begun putting together a new cabinet that would be one of the most reactionary governments since the end of the military dictatorship 31 years ago.

The drive forward to impeachment followed a brief crisis generated Monday by the announcement from the newly installed interim speaker of the lower house of congress, Waldir Maranhão of the right-wing Popular Party (also a former coalition partner of the PT), that he was revoking the April 17 vote by the lower house to recommend impeachment to the Senate. He said that the process had been marred by irregularities, including parties imposing discipline on their members to support the impeachment vote and members announcing how they would vote in advance of the session.

The reaction to Maranhão's action was swift and overwhelming. First the financial markets rendered their verdict. Brazil's currency, the real, fell by 4.6 percent against the dollar, and the Ibovespa stock

market plummeted by 3.5 percent.

This was in line with previous rises and falls based upon whether the move to oust Rousseff appeared to be advancing or receding. Predominant layers within both Brazilian and international finance and corporate capital have already rendered their verdict that drastic changes in government policy and class relations are needed in Brazil, which faces its worst economic crisis since the Great Depression, and that they can best be carried out by dispensing with the services of the Workers Party.

The media response to Maranhão's attempt to revoke the impeachment vote was brutal, with

Folha de S.Paulo, Brazil's most influential daily, describing his actions as a "grotesque surprise" and a "farce that only prejudices the image of the country." Similarly, the *Diario Catarinense* carried a lead article titled "Waldir Maranhão and the circus of national embarrassment."

Meanwhile his own party threatened to expel him and revoke his mandate, while other parties met behind his back to seek his removal.

For his part, the leader of the Senate, Renan Calheiros, dismissed the move as "playing around with democracy" and said the Senate would move ahead with its impeachment vote regardless.

In less than 24 hours, Maranhão revoked his own revocation in a brief statement issued after midnight. The leadership of the Progressive Party indicated that it would go ahead with seeking Maranhão's removal, even after his capitulation to the political pressure.

Maranhão had assumed the speaker's post only last week after his predecessor, Eduardo Cunha, was removed on the order of the Supreme Court, which found that he was using his position as a means of obstructing justice and attaining personal benefit.

Cunha, a right-wing evangelical Christian radio commentator and also former ally of the PT government, is accused of receiving millions of dollars in bribes and kickbacks in connection with contracts with the state-run oil giant Petrobras.

In a last ditch attempt to derail the impeachment process, Rousseff's attorney general, José Eduardo Cardozo, filed an appeal with the Supreme Court to order its interruption. The government is using the court's decision to oust Cunha, arguing that the impeachment drive itself is part of the same attempt to obstruct justice and accrue personal benefit from public office. Cunha had threatened the government that he would move for impeachment if the Workers Party failed to provide the votes needed to stop a congressional ethics committee from voting for his removal. When the PT failed to produce the votes, he filed for impeachment the same day.

Under conditions in which leading figures in every party, including Temer himself, are under investigation in connection with the Petrobras scandal, Rousseff is being impeached on charges that she manipulated government accounts to pay for programs and conceal a deficit, something which she and her supporters point out has been done by successive governments for decades.

One member of the court, Gilmar Mendes, made no effort to conceal his contempt for the government's appeal, declaring, "They can go to heaven, to the pope or to hell."

On the eve of the Senate's impeachment vote, there was a series of developments that pointed to the sharp dangers confronting the Brazilian working class with the extraordinary attempt to remove Brazil's elected president.

Demonstrations were carried out throughout the country Tuesday, with protesters opposing the impeachment blocking highways, roads and transit systems, in some cases with barricades of burning tires.

After a fairly small protest was broken up by police in the city of Sao Paulo, Alexandre de Moraes, the security secretary for Sao Paulo, who heads up the state's 100,000-strong Military Police force, declared that the actions were not "demonstrations" because the protesters had nothing to oppose. Instead, he classified them as "guerrilla actions" and warned that those who participated would be hunted down as criminals.

On the same day, police beat up students and journalists at a demonstration called to protest against the Sao Paulo school lunch scandal, in which funds destined for school lunches have been looted by politicians.

Moraes has been tapped by Temer to serve as minister of justice once Rousseff is impeached.

In an even more chilling development, an entire planeload of women coming from the northeastern city of Salvador to the capital of Bahia for a political conference were held by Federal Police onboard the plane after it landed. Their "offense" was to have shouted slogans denouncing two members of congress on the flight as "coup supporters." The police questioned every passenger, demanding that they produce identification.

Neither the PT nor the pseudo-left groups that orbit it are either interested in or capable of making any genuine appeal to the working class to mobilize against the threats posed by the change in government.

Typical of their political bankruptcy was Miguel Rosseto, the former leader of the Pabloite Democracia Socialista group, who is now minister of labor in the Rousseff government. On the eve of the impeachment, he made a statement declaring Rousseff's commitment to "legality, the constitution and democracy," as well as her intention to "continue the debate with the Senate and the Supreme Court" and to "preserve the dialogue with Brazilian society." There was not a word about the class interests underlying the impeachment drive or the dangers confronting Brazilian workers.



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