

Brazilian Senate votes to proceed with trial of Workers Party president

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12 August 2016

The Brazilian Senate's vote Wednesday to move ahead with an impeachment trial of ousted Workers Party (PT) President Dilma Rousseff has been accompanied by a concerted drive by the "interim" administration of Michel Temer to ram through sweeping austerity policies. The purpose of these measures is to impose the full burden of the crisis gripping Latin America's largest economy—the worst in a century—onto the backs of the working class.

Wednesday's vote, which followed a 15-hour, all-night session, was 59 to 21 in support of the trial, exceeding not only the simple majority needed to launch the trial, but five more votes than the two-thirds super majority required to end it by permanently removing Rousseff from office.

The Senate's action appeared to have sealed not only Rousseff's fate, but that of the PT, which has ruled Brazil for the past 13 years, including two terms under her predecessor, former metalworkers union leader Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva.

The formal grounds for the impeachment are trumped up charges of fiscal improprieties by Rousseff, alleged loans secured from banks and budgetary allocations made behind the back of congress in an attempt to conceal the depth of the crisis in the run-up to her re-election in 2014. The PT president and her supporters have insisted that the same methods have been employed by virtually every administration that preceded her own.

The driving force for the removal of Brazil's elected government, however, is the demand by both Brazilian and international finance capital for a radical change in regime in order to carry through draconian attacks on social spending and working class living standards designed to "restore economic growth" by lowering labor costs and ensuring higher profits and unfettered

operations by big business.

Those supporting impeachment and Temer, previously Rousseff's vice president and political ally, have been able to carry through this undemocratic conspiracy because of the overwhelming popular hostility toward the PT, which not only failed to introduce policies to protect Brazilian workers from the impact of the economic crisis, including an official unemployment rate that has topped 11 percent, but rather sought to initiate the same austerity policies now pursued by the interim government.

On top of that was the party's deep involvement in the Petrobras bribes for contracts scandal, which saw billions of dollars siphoned out of the state-run energy giant to finance politicians' election campaigns and line their pockets.

In addition to the impeachment of Rousseff, a trial of her predecessor, Lula, is also in the works. He was officially charged last month with obstruction of justice for allegedly masterminding a scheme to buy the silence of former Petrobras director Nestor Cerveró over the Petrobras kickbacks.

Meanwhile, Temer himself, a member of the Brazilian Democratic Movement Party (PMDB) along with his "interim foreign minister," José Serra, former presidential candidate of (Brazilian Social Democracy Party) PSDB, are implicated in illegal campaign contributions from the construction conglomerate, Odebrecht, whose billionaire director, Marcelo Odebrecht, has been jailed since July of last year in connection with the Petrobras scandal. He has apparently named both, along with PT leaders, in a plea bargain arrangement.

Supporters of Rousseff have charged that Temer and his allies in the Senate are seeking to rush through the impeachment, which is now expected to conclude by

the end of this month, in order to grant him status as a sitting president, which would grant him impunity under the Brazilian constitution in relation to investigations into offenses occurring before he took office.

Meanwhile, the government is pushing through a series of “reforms,” including a proposal to impose a spending ceiling that could last for 20 years, bankrupting the country’s health care and education system, as well as labor law revisions attacking workers’ rights and a pension reform that would raise the minimum retirement age to 70.

While PT members of Congress have denounced the measures, those who support them point out that Rousseff had proposed similar legislation. Then, however, they had blocked the measures as part of the attempt to bring about her downfall.

Recent polls have shown that two-thirds of the Brazilian population support the removal of Rousseff, but an equal number also oppose Temer’s presidency.

Rousseff has responded to the actions by preparing an open letter to the Brazilian people and to the Senate, pledging that if she were to survive the impeachment, she would seek a popular referendum to call early elections. Reportedly, she is dropping her previous references to her removal from office as a “coup” in order to curry favor from the political right.

While a recent poll has shown 62 percent of the population supporting early elections, there is little if any possibility that this maneuver will succeed, however. It would require not only a vote by a super-majority in Congress to amend the constitution, but also the approval of the judiciary, and, in all likelihood, would take over a year to implement, bringing her close to the end of her term.

Hostility to Temer has been expressed in scattered protests, including at the Olympic games, where demonstrators holding up signs opposing the interim president have been hustled out of the stands by militarized police in scenes reminiscent of the military dictatorship that took power in 1964 and ruled the country for 21 years.

But the attempt by the pseudo-left in Brazil to subordinate these protests to the PT and its affiliated union federation, the CUT, have served to block any mass popular appeal.

The pseudo-left groups themselves have been thrown

into intense crisis by the removal of the PT government. The Morenoite PSTU (Unified Socialist Workers Party) suffered a split which saw half the membership leave the party. While neither those who left nor the PSTU leadership itself have provided any clarification of the grounds for the split—each side declaring their respect for the other as “revolutionaries”—the reality is that it rose entirely from national tactical issues; specifically, the demand raised by PSTU of *fora todos* “throw them all out,” during the impeachment drive.

The demand constituted a reactionary adaptation to the right-wing impeachment drive and its impact upon popular consciousness, failing to distinguish between bringing down the PT government from the right and bringing it down from the left. Those who split found it increasingly uncomfortable to defend this position within the broader “left” milieu dominated by more open supporters of Rousseff and the PT.

Meanwhile, the Pabloite layers embedded in the PSOL (Socialism and Liberty Party), a parliamentary split-off from the PT, have latched onto the demand for new elections, seeking to channel popular anger back into bourgeois politics and hoping to score more positions in municipal elections set for October.

Despite the efforts of these elements, the austerity measures being prepared will inevitably bring the Brazilian working class into a new wave of class struggle against an unstable and corrupt government, whether it is headed by Rousseff or, far more likely, Temer.



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