

Brazilian Senate votes to remove President Rousseff of Workers Party

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Brazil's Senate voted Wednesday afternoon by an overwhelming majority to confirm the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff, effectively ending more than 13 years of rule by the Workers Party (PT), which first came to power in 2003 under the presidency of former metalworkers union leader Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva.

A two-thirds majority was needed to permanently oust Rousseff from office. In the event, three-quarters of the Senate voted to remove her, with 61 senators voting for her conviction and 20 voting against. There were no abstentions.

A separate vote was taken on an article calling for Rousseff to be barred from any public office or employment for eight years. This gained majority support but failed to obtain the necessary two-thirds vote.

The charges against Rousseff were of a trumped-up character, brought by a cabal of corrupt, right-wing politicians who until recently were the closest allies of Rousseff and the PT.

The Senate found the Brazilian president guilty of issuing three unauthorized supplementary spending decrees and engaging in so-called fiscal peddling, i.e., delaying payments to the state-run Banco do Brasil to cover up holes in funding for social programs. Supporters of the impeachment charged that both measures were intended to conceal the depth of Brazil's economic crisis in the run-up to Rousseff's 2014 reelection.

Rousseff's defenders countered that similar fiscal measures had been employed by previous Brazilian presidents as well as by state governors, and that the real impulse for the impeachment was the government's failure to protect leading politicians caught up in the massive corruption scandal involving billions of dollars in bribes and kickbacks from the state-run energy conglomerate Petrobras.

The impeachment proceedings were initiated in December of last year by the then-president of the Chamber of Deputies, Eduardo Cunha, immediately after PT deputies on a congressional ethics committee investigating his diversion of millions of dollars in bribe money to secret Swiss bank accounts announced that they would vote against him.

According to the group Transparency Brazil, fully 60 percent of the Brazilian lawmakers who voted on impeachment are themselves either under criminal investigation or have already been convicted on corruption charges.

In a speech delivered after the vote to finalize her removal from office, Rousseff declared the impeachment "the second coup" she had faced in her lifetime. The first was the 1964 US-backed coup that brought to power the military dictatorship under which she was imprisoned and tortured. The second, she said, was "the parliamentary coup concluded today by means of a juridical farce."

She charged that the "coup" was the work of a "powerful conservative and reactionary force" bent on disrupting her government's "progressive national project" and introducing the "most radical economic liberalism and social regression." She added, "It is a misogynist coup, a homophobic coup, a racist coup," concluding her remarks with a verse from the Russian poet Mayakovsky.

The PT's "progressive national project" consisted essentially of minimal social assistance programs made possible by the commodities and emerging market booms that have since gone bust. This was combined with an aggressive defense of the interests of Brazilian capitalism and the faithful fulfillment of obligations to the international banks and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The crisis that has gripped much of Latin America has undermined this model in Brazil, just as it has either brought down or driven into deep crisis other governments identified with the so-called turn to the left begun at the beginning of the millennium.

After being sworn in as president in the Senate, Rousseff's former vice president (and acting president since the vote of the lower house in favor of impeachment in May), Michel Temer, of the Brazilian Democratic Movement Party (PMDB), convened a meeting of his cabinet in which he declared he would no longer tolerate anyone referring to him as a *golpista* (putschist). "The *golpista* is you who are against the Constitution," he said of

his critics. “Things have been defined and it’s necessary to be very firm... this is no joke.”

Temer, who flew Wednesday night to China for the meeting of the G20 leading economies, also issued a taped speech which was broadcast on national radio and television Wednesday night. He hailed the impeachment as “democratic and transparent.” He declared that “uncertainty has come to an end,” and added, “It is the hour for uniting the country and placing the interests of the nation over the interests of groups.”

He indicated what he meant by this, stating that “the government is like your family. If it falls into debt, it must cut its expenses.” He warned that the government would soon be unable to pay out retirement benefits without introducing social security “reform.”

Temer, who is supposed to occupy the presidency through the end of 2018, added that his “mission is to show businessmen and investors of the whole world” that Brazil is offering “good deals” and will “guarantee investors political stability.” To that end, he added, a “modernization” of Brazil’s labor laws was required as well as measures to make the state more “agile.”

The newly installed, unelected president acknowledged that he was assuming power with Brazil “mired in a grave economic crisis.” Just two days before, the Brazilian statistics agency IBGE reported that the official unemployment rate had risen again in the last quarter, reaching 11.6 percent, with roughly 12 million Brazilians without work. At least 3.4 million have lost their jobs in the last year alone. The economy shrank by 0.6 percent, the sixth consecutive quarter of decline.

Temer’s program is aimed at placing the full burden of this crisis onto the backs of the Brazilian working class. In addition to the measures he hinted at in his recorded remarks, the government is preparing a constitutional amendment that would bar any increase in spending for up to 20 years and scrap requirements guaranteeing health and education budgets, threatening a further gutting of essential social services.

The protests of Rousseff, the PT and its pseudo-left apologists notwithstanding, the Workers Party had itself attempted to introduce similar measures. In its bid to ward off impeachment, the PT’s principal argument was that it was best suited to carry out such sweeping attacks while guaranteeing “governability” by virtue of its ties to the trade unions and the government-affiliated “social movements.”

It appealed not to the working class and oppressed masses to defeat what it termed a coup, but rather to the right-wing politicians who were organizing it, with former President Lula attempting to cajole them into voting against impeachment.

The ultimate decision to oust Rousseff was driven by the demands of Brazilian and international finance capital, which wanted a change in regime in order to accelerate the attacks already begun under the rule of the PT.

Polls have indicated that the vast majority of the population is hostile to both Rousseff and Temer, who are seen as part of the same corrupt capitalist state apparatus pursuing essentially the same political and economic agendas. Nonetheless, the impeachment will be used to rapidly intensify the attacks on Brazilian workers.

The Brazilian pseudo-left organizations, including those that broke with the Trotskyist movement, the International Committee of the Fourth International, in the 1960s, bear grave responsibility for the immense dangers now confronting the Brazilian working class. They played a key role in forming the PT and liquidated themselves into it, promoting the illusion of a Brazilian parliamentary road to socialism that made the building of a revolutionary Marxist party in the working class no longer necessary. The PT in power incubated the extreme right-wing forces that are now being unleashed against the Brazilian workers and oppressed.

Reflecting the position of Wall Street, State Department spokesman John Kirby Wednesday afternoon issued Washington’s seal of approval for the impeachment. “The Brazilian Senate, in accordance with Brazil’s constitutional framework, has voted to remove President Rousseff from office,” he said. “We’re confident that we will continue the strong bilateral relationship that exists between our two countries... We plan to continue this very essential collaboration.”

He added that bringing down Rousseff was “a decision made by the Brazilian people, and obviously, we respect that.”



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