

Brazil's president forced to rescind order calling out the army against protesters

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Brazil's President Michel Temer Thursday was forced to rescind an executive order he had issued the day before calling the army into the streets and giving it powers of arrest for the period of one week.

The measure was ostensibly taken to quell a protest Wednesday in the capital of Brasilia called by the unions and social movements to oppose pension and labor "reforms" attacking basic social rights and to demand Temer's ouster and replacement through the calling of direct elections.

Calling out the army, however, had the air of an act of desperation on the part of a president who is facing multiple corruption charges and is viewed as illegitimate by the majority of the Brazilian population.

The most recent opinion polls indicate that Temer, the former vice president who was installed in the presidential palace through the impeachment of his predecessor, Workers Party (PT) President Dilma Rousseff in August 2016 on trumped-up charges of budgetary irregularities, is opposed by 95 percent of the population, with 85 percent favoring the immediate convening of new elections.

Wednesday's demonstration in Brasilia drew tens of thousands of protesters into the streets of the isolated, inland capital. The protest was largely peaceful until a group of masked members of the so-called black bloc, a group that has frequently been infiltrated by *agents provocateurs*, attacked police and vandalized government ministry buildings, setting one, the agricultural ministry, on fire.

Police responded with overwhelming and disproportionate force against the demonstrators as a whole, unleashing massive amounts of teargas, firing stun grenades and rubber bullets, sending mounted police with riot sticks into the crowds and, at one point, firing live ammunition at protesters.

Some 50 people were reported wounded in the repression. Among those most seriously hurt was a street

vendor who was not even part of the protest but was shot in the face.

The order calling out armed troops to protect the capital came as the demonstration had already been largely dispersed. The confusion and seeming panic surrounding the decision raised serious concerns that Temer was resorting to the use of the military in a bid to prop up his crisis-ridden government and suppress mass opposition.

Bringing troops into the streets under the present conditions of extreme crisis has historic political implications in Brazil, a country that was ruled for over two decades by military dictatorship following the US-backed coup of 1964.

The issuance of the decree under Brazil's "Guarantee of Law and Order" statute briefly saw troops deployed around government ministries and elsewhere in the capital. Army soldiers had already been stationed for some time outside Planalto, the country's presidential palace.

Under the terms of the law, the army is to be called out only for limited periods when regular police forces are unable to cope with a supposed threat to social order and government institutions.

Neither the governor of Brasilia's federal district, nor, apparently, the army command itself believed that this was the situation Wednesday.

Brasilia's Governor Rodrigo Rollemberg charged that he had not been consulted, as required by law, before the troops were called out, condemning the decision as an "extreme measure" not warranted by the situation in the capital.

Gen. Eduardo da Costa Villas Bôas, the commander of the Brazilian Army, made a statement Wednesday after the issuance of the order, assuring the population that the military would act in accordance with the Constitution. "Our democracy is not in danger," he said. That such an assurance was deemed necessary underscored the depth of

the current political crisis.

Villas Bôas made his disagreement with the premise of the decree plain, telling the media, “I believe that the police should still have the ability to maintain order.” He said that the military would remain on alert “in case something gets out of control.”

The army commander went on to acknowledge that the atmosphere both in the presidential palace and in the military command itself was one of “shock” and “great insecurity” following recent revelations implicating Temer in corruption and obstruction of justice.

Brazil’s Supreme Court last week authorized the opening of a criminal investigation against Temer after he was taped by the CEO of the country’s giant meatpacking conglomerate JBS, Joesley Batista, voicing his approval for payoffs to buy the silence of Eduardo Cunha, the former head of the lower house of Congress. Temer was also recorded being told that Batista and his company were paying off prosecutors and judges to derail investigations into his company. The tape was given to prosecutors as part of a plea bargain deal.

While Temer has repeatedly declared that he will not resign and will have to be thrown out of office, his closest political allies in Congress are reportedly deserting him and calling for him to step down.

“Political parties allied with Michel Temer’s government have come to the conclusion that the President has lost his ability to remain in office,” the influential daily *Folha de S.P.* reported Thursday. The paper reported that the right-wing PSDB (Brazilian Social Democracy Party) is leading the move against Temer and has communicated its attitude to the Brazilian president. The PSDB’s own leading member and presidential candidate, who placed a close second to Rousseff in the 2014 presidential election, has been stripped of his Senate seat and ordered to surrender his passport as prosecutors prepare to order his jailing over related corruption charges.

According to *Folha*, the bourgeois parties that had backed Temer during the ouster of Rousseff are now banking on Brazil’s Federal Superior Electoral Tribunal (TSE) issuing a ruling early next month invalidating the 2014 election of Rousseff and Temer, then her vice presidential running mate, on the grounds that the campaign was illegally financed.

Such a decision would lead to indirect elections by the Congress, whose members’ main concern is to preserve their own skins, with dozens of congressmen and fully a third of the Senate under investigation in connection with

the spiraling multi-billion-dollar corruption scandal centered on bribes and kickbacks in connection with contracts with the giant state-run energy conglomerate Petrobras.

The calling of direct elections would require Congress to pass a constitutional amendment, which is presently viewed as improbable. *Folha* reported that the Workers Party, which publicly is demanding direct elections, touting former President Lula da Silva—also facing trial on corruption charges—as the likely front-runner, is behind the scenes negotiating with other bourgeois parties on a compromise candidate to replace Temer through a congressional vote.

The country’s leading financial journal *Valor* Thursday published an interview with leading economist Yoshiaki Nakano, dean of the Sao Paulo School of Economy at the Getulio Vargas Foundation, in which he argued that Temer’s “resignation is the most favorable scenario for the economy.”

The concern of Brazilian big business is that the corruption scandal has crippled Temer’s ability to push through the sweeping attacks on the basic rights and living standards of Brazilian workers contained, in the first instance, in the so-called pension and labor reform laws that are now stalled in Congress.

It was to implement such measures, which expand upon the attacks already begun under the PT governments of Lula and Rousseff, that Temer was brought to power. The aim is to place the full burden of the country’s worst economic crisis in a century squarely on the backs of the Brazilian working class.

However, the country’s government and all of the bourgeois parties, including the PT, have become so discredited that imposing such an agenda becomes ever more difficult, outside of a return to dictatorial methods of rule.



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