

What is at stake with the coup in Brazil?

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Brazil's current political crisis was stirred up from the day after President Dilma Rousseff was re-elected with more than 54 million votes in October 2014. It was the fourth consecutive victory of progressive forces in the country's presidential elections.

First the national right wing, again defeated, asked for a recount. Then they tried to question the budgetary accounts of the re-elected president's campaign and sponsored several other maneuvers aimed at impeachment. Since 2015, fabricated scandals were widely publicised by the media, giving truth to hundreds of lies. The architecture of the coup was drawn, therefore, from the daily action of the media oligopoly (in Brazil, six families control 80% of the media – TV, newspapers, magazines, radio, news agencies, and web sites) with financial support from industry, the finance sector, and agribusiness.

The right wing that conspired openly against an elected president's mandate is the result of centuries of slavery and resistance against slavery which mark Brazil's history. It is the legitimate heir of the social and economic forces historically responsible for that regime. When they reached the country, these elites stormed our land and wealth. Captured Africans were brought by force to Portuguese America, and initially became the fundamental labour force in sugarcane, tobacco and cotton plantations. Later this was repeated in villages and towns, mines, and cattle ranches. The socially dominant class, consisting of a white minority, justified this condition by pseudo-religious and racist ideas that legitimised their alleged superiority and their privileges.

Ethnic differences functioned as social barriers. Human beings were enslaved in Brazil for more than three centuries. It was the last country to abolish slavery, which was the main form of manual labour in the national economy. Slavery was not only an economic activity in which one individual was the property of another. It also established a set of values in relation to work, people and institutions, thus constituting a prejudiced culture that persists to this day. What defined and characterised the colonial elite, who lived on rents, public largesse and the income of large estates, was primarily what it was not: manual work has always been seen as a lesser activity, a thing of pagans and slaves.

Today, the Brazilian elite still insists on a wild capitalism and does not accept that black, poor, and indigenous people, women, homosexuals, and slums dwellers have the right to respect and dignity. Social apartheid is evident in the resentment expressed by much of the middle class, who identify with the top of the social pyramid. This group fosters segregation and does not accept the changes which have occurred since Lula's victory in the presidential elections of 2003. They want to sustain underemploy-

ment and exploitation and believe that airports, shopping centers and universities are social spaces solely for the white and wealthy elite.

The project represented by the Lula and Rousseff governments was responsible for the social rise of more than 40 million Brazilians, creating more than 20 million formal jobs and implementing a new, more just social and economic development model. It prioritised strengthening the internal market, at the same time intensifying relations between the countries of Latin America and Africa, and was the protagonist in the creation of the BRICS.

The coup is above all an attempt to stop this process of social mobility and sovereign national development. Specifically, the objectives of this attempt include, first, preventing the country from increasing its role in the region and the world, either through participation in BRICS or as a player in the UN and other international organisations, to brake the growth of the country in the international arena as part of the US strategy to keep Latin America as its backyard. The second objective is to force the country to deliver its extraordinary natural resources, especially its water reserves and the huge oil reserves recently discovered. The third objective is the resumption of national government by the conservative parliament elected in 2014, since they cannot win through the popular vote.

To achieve this set of objectives, the coup coordinated a broad coalition of national and international actors. At first, it was led by the defeated candidate of the right-wing opposition party, Aécio Neves. Today, however, the three key parts of the parliamentary, legal and media coup are, first, Eduardo Cunha, removed from the presidency of the Chamber of Deputies by the Supreme Court after accusations of corruption and money laundering, with millions of dollars in accounts in Switzerland. The second is the judiciary's investigations and selective leaks through ostentatious media actions which contributed to a breakdown of democratic and institutional order. And last but not least is national and international capital, through their representatives – confederations and employers' federations, major media, and conservative political parties, supported enthusiastically by the richest portion of the Brazilian society who are aligned with the geopolitical interests of the rich countries seeking to reduce the cost of labour in the Brazilian economy and, as we pointed out, hand over our national wealth.

The scammer, Michel Temer, who was Rousseff's running mate in the 2010 election, extinguished a number of ministries as his first act of interim admin-

istration during Rousseff's impeachment trial, including the Ministry for Women, Racial Equality and Human Rights; the Ministry for Agrarian Development, which was responsible for family agriculture and agrarian reform; the Ministry of Culture, recreated after a broad national movement of artists; the Ministry of Science and Technology; and the Comptroller General, responsible for transparency and fighting corruption.

The interim administration is composed of seven ministers who are under investigation by the Operação Lava Jato (the Car Wash Operation), an investigation conducted by the federal police about corruption in the state-owned oil firm Petrobras. Also, for the first time since the military dictatorship, the administration has no woman, and also no one young, no one black, and no representatives of minorities, social movements or trade unions. So far, in just one month, three ministers of the coup government were forced to resign following serious charges of repeated instances of corruption. Michel Temer himself is accused by one of the informers in the Car Wash Operation of having negotiated 1.5 million Reals in illegal donations to a political ally who ran in municipal elections in 2012.

Within a few days of the coup, the interim government announced several serious setbacks in social policies, such as a pension reform that further impedes the access of workers to retirement and reduces their benefits; a labour reform that makes the rights guaranteed in the consolidation of labour laws, the Consolidação das Leis do Trabalho (CLT) in trading object, whichever is negotiated over the legislated; a reduction in the size of the Unified Health System; charging fees for public universities; cuts in the Bolsa Família (family allowance), a direct income transfer program, that could affect up to 30% of the beneficiaries; cuts to the housing programs for people with low income, which has been managed in partnership with social movements; attacks on the democratic right to demonstrate; and a foreign policy submissive to the interest of the big powers and hostile to other democratically elected Latin American governments, who do not recognise the legitimacy of this government.

In the most serious attack on social rights since the enactment of the constitution in 1988, the illegitimate government wants investments in health and education fixed for a period of ten years, corrected only for inflation in the previous year. If this rule had been in place since 2006, the federal health budget would now be 30% lower than it is and education would have suffered a brutal cut of around 70%. It is worth remembering that this rule proposed by the interim government would also focus on the budgets of state governments and municipal governments. It would be literally the destruction of our public health and education systems.

Thus we can say that the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff meant a desperate attempt to implement a tougher anti-popular program, even worse than the one that had been systematically defeated in the last four presidential elections. Voters and especially the poor do not count in the calculations of the coup junta. Only a government which resulted from a coup could propose

measures so disconnected from the manifest interests of the vast majority of the population. The Brazilian people expect greater investment in social areas, especially health and education, and reject changes in labour legislation and social security that mean reduction of rights.

The CUT (the Central Única dos Trabalhadores, the biggest trade union federation) does not recognise the Temer government and condemns it as illegitimate, being a result of a coup and an illegal impeachment process, and disregarding the expressed will of the majority of Brazilian citizens who elected President Dilma in 2014. That is the sole elected government and, therefore, the only legitimate one. We will not accept that the working class and the poorest sectors of the population have to make even more sacrifices. We have fought against the coup until now and will continue fighting in the streets and in the workplaces to bring the country back to the rule of law and democracy, and to oppose the reduction of rights of working women and men and the initiatives that seek to subordinate Brazil's role in the international economy.

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