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Brazil

A complicated situation for the radical left

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Brazil is experiencing a profound institutional crisis, the biggest since the end of the dictatorship. [1] The Roussef government is seriously damaged, leading to its paralysis, but so are the principal institutions of bourgeois democracy. The main leaders in Parliament are involved in Operation Lava Jato, including Eduardo Cunha, president of the Chamber of Deputies, as one of the defendants in the trial. The leaders of the traditional parties, those who are part of the government as well as those in the right wing opposition (including the PMDB, the party of Cunha and Vice President Michel Temer, which recently withdrew from the government) are under investigation.

Such a situation is contributing to produce great chaos in the institutions, with a judiciary divided at all levels. To this is added an intense crisis of credibility of the traditional institutions and of the modus operandi of bourgeois democracy, of which the first signs were expressed in the streets in 2013 [3].

Brazil is therefore experiencing a full-scale political crisis, on top of the serious economic, social and environmental crisis. This is resulting in growing unemployment, inflation, a wage freeze, the collapse of public services and the disasters and crimes against the environment, symbolizing the failure of a development model. The exhaustion of the model of "growth", adopted during the Lula "periods", with now the implementation of a policy of neoliberal adjustment and recession, has produced a scenario of long-term stagnation. Whatever the outcome in the short term, an accumulation of medium-term crises can be expected to continue, bringing with it social and political tensions.

The "lulopetista" cycle is dying. The possibilities of maintaining the export-based "neo-extrativista" model of growth are becoming exhausted. Even if there is political survival through the recent polarization between the two camps in the institutional war, the strategy established by Lulaism, which consisted of encouraging entrepreneurs, agribusiness and financial capital and, simultaneously, making some concessions to the poorest layers, no longer has any political and ethical possibility of appearing as a shift to the left. Even after putting more than 100,000 people in the streets of Sao Paulo, Lula continues to encourage the representatives of capital to trust him to be the guarantor of the social pact. In this context, he is reediting, in more humiliating terms, the "Letter to the Brazilian People" of 2002. This is the end of a long cycle of the Brazilian left.

In the midst of the political polarization that has developed during the two years of the Dilma government, in Brazilian society right-wing ideas and sentiments are developing, with a will to impose criminal punishment and the search for a Saviour, in other words a Bonaparte, capable of stopping corruption.

The anti-petismo spectrum is divided into two parts: one more liberal and the other more conservative, with many points of intersection between them. Some movements of a liberal character, such as the Free Brazil Movement (MBL) and "Come and demonstrate" (Vem Para Rua) and other more reactionary ones, including some religious leaders and some advocates of a return to military dictatorship, such as Bolsonaro, have seen their ability to exert influence grow.

In this context, violent attitudes and hate-filled speeches have been made against the left in general. Furthermore, the media is playing a role of incitement to hatred and of manipulation of information, sometimes directly or indirectly contributing to more or less serious episodes of violence.

The crisis of the old left in power, which has implemented unpopular and repressive policies (particularly in the big urban peripheries, against young people and blacks), and the offensive of the intolerant right and its incitement to

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hatred, rebound against left-wing and socialist ideas as a whole. There must be the opening of a period of reorganization of the mass movement and the possibility of a new cycle for the reconstruction of a left project.

Young people are today experiencing the reality of unemployment, violence, of the lack of public services and democratic rights. Moreover, they identify with neither of the two main poles that are at war today, which explains their low participation in the mobilizations in March. We should also note the presence of more progressive sectors of society and of the "working-class bases" of the former historic bloc, who demonstrated massively to defend democratic freedoms, with many criticisms of the government, either because of its unpopular economic policies or because of obvious corruption.

The present scenario in Brazil is very difficult to manage for the anti-capitalist and socialist left. A government that came from the working-class and people's movement is in the process of being overthrown by the right, whose principal agents are the judiciary, the opposition in Parliament and the media, orchestrated by the Globe Group, which is hegemonic there.

This government, in free fall, is not a progressive government, but a government that is implementing a neoliberal adjustment policy and which, when it is under pressure, moves further to the right: the anti terrorist law, the announcement of wage cuts, attacks on civil servants and pension reform, the perspective of suspending adjustments to the minimum wage.

Despite the measures clearly favouring the interests of capital, the employers' organizations, the representatives of finance and of the media are in agreement on the inability of Dilma Rouseff to implement the adjustment plans so as to ensure their stability. They therefore consider it necessary to replace her.

The massive mobilizations on March 13 (for the destitution of Dilma), and on March 18 and 31 (against the destitution of Dilma) were quite heterogeneous in different cities and regions. The last one, involving some some 700,000 people throughout the country, witnessed demonstrations that were globally against the destitution of Dilma, for democracy and against the anti-social policies of the government. Nevertheless, a large majority of the population is for the departure of the president and the government has lost its majority popular base.

The possibility of a new coup d'état, as in 1964, is not on the agenda. Nevertheless, the weight of religious fundamentalist institutions, the influence of oligarchic sectors, as well as of sectors related to the arms industry and the various police forces, are defending retrograde projects and trying to liquidate past gains.

At the beginning of the investigations into corruption, businessmen and right-wing personalities, belonging to the government or not, were imprisoned. But the prolonged institutional crisis has created an atmosphere where everything-is-permitted, thanks to Operation Lava Jato, by aberrant and undemocratic judicial operations against those accused who are identified with the government; this is coordinated with all the major media and the right-wing opposition. The general indignation against corruption and the PT is helping the majority of the forces representing capital to work for a change of government without any democratic change in the political regime.

The period that has opened up presents a difficult transition because of the absence of a socialist left with sufficient influence to become the protagonist of an alternative to the crisis. The Socialism and Freedom Party (PSOL) is respected in social struggles, intervenes in sectors of youth and of various sectors of the oppressed and gathers several million votes in elections. It is the main party of the socialist left. However, it is not yet able to present a real alternative to the crisis, even though it situates itself as a left opposition, against the government's concessions to capital, against the privileges of the ruling class, against corruption. And it is clear that it absolutely does not defend the manoeuvres of the right to bring down Rouseff.

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In fact, the impeachment process of the President by Parliament is led by its president, who is himself implicated in the investigations into Petrobras and in a series of crimes. At the same time, many efforts are being made (by the media and the judiciary) not to highlight the involvement of personalities of the right opposition in Operation Lava Jato, including members of the Party of the Brazilian Democratic Movement (PMDB), which has just left the government and of which Temer, the Vice-President, is a member.

If the impeachment of Dilma proceeded through "normal" or legal channels, it would be necessary to prevent Temer from taking over the leadership of the country. Moreover, even some of the mainstream media, which are now, generally speaking, in the anti-PT camp, say that Temer has no support to govern. They demand the destitution of both Dilma and Temer. Polls say that if elections were held today, Temer would only get one per cent of the vote.

The way out of such a crisis lies in calling presidential and legislative elections.

Concrete campaigns against the attacks of the conservatives on social rights, against police violence, against fiscal adjustment, among others, must continue to be expressed by real movements with concrete demands that strengthen the social organization of the socialist left. At this stage of a reorganization that is still poorly defined, transitional initiatives should be carried out in order to build new unitary instruments of the left opposition that are independent of the government.

[1] This article was written before the impeachment vote on Sunday 17 April.

[2] Operation Lava Jato is a criminal investigation into embezzlement and money-laundering involving Petrobras (a Brazilian firm linked to the oil industry), involving very important entrepreneurs and politicians.

[3] In 2013, a huge wave of strikes, spontaneous mobilizations of youth and various revolts spread across in the country.