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Brazil

Brazil: the coup d'état

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Let's call a spade a spade. What has just happened in Brazil, with the dismissal of the elected president, Dilma Rousseff, is a coup. A coup which is pseudo-legal, "constitutional", "institutional", parliamentary, anything you want, but a coup all the same.

Parliamentarians – deputies and senators – who are massively compromised in cases of corruption (the figure of 60% has been quoted) have established a procedure for dismissal against the Brazilian president, Dilma Rousseff, under the pretext of accounting irregularities, adjustments to fill the deficits in the public accounts - a routine practice of all previous Brazilian governments! Certainly, several executives of the Workers' Party (PT) are involved in the corruption scandal concerning Petrobras, the national oil company but not Dilma.

In fact, the right wing deputies who have led the campaign against the President are among the most mired in this affair, starting with the President of the Parliament, Eduardo Cunha (recently suspended), accused of corruption, money laundering, tax evasion in Panama and so on.

The practice of the legal coup seems to be the new strategy of the oligarchies in Latin America. Put to the test in Honduras and in Paraguay - countries that the press often deals with as "banana republics" - it has proved effective in eliminating presidents who are (very moderately) on the left. Now it comes to be applied to a country-continent.

One can make a lot of criticisms to Dilma: she has not kept her electoral promises and has made enormous concessions to the bankers, industrialists, and latifundistas (big landowners). The political and social left has been demanding a change in economic and social policy for the last year. But the oligarchy of divine right in Brazil - the financial, industrial, and agricultural capitalist elite – are not content with more concessions: they want full power. They no longer want to negotiate but to govern directly, through their trusted confidantes, and to abolish the few social achievements of recent years.

Citing Hegel, Marx wrote in the Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte, that historical events repeat themselves: the first time as tragedy, and the second as farce. This applies perfectly to Brazil. The military coup of April 1964 was a tragedy, which plunged Brazil into twenty years of military dictatorship, at the price of hundreds dead and thousands tortured. The parliamentary coup of May 2016 is a farce, a tragi-comic affair, where we see a clique of reactionary and notoriously corrupt parliamentarians to overthrow a president democratically elected by 54 million Brazilians, on account of "accounting irregularities". The main component of this alliance of parties on the right is the parliamentary bloc known as "the three Bs": "Bullets" (members related to the Military Police, the death squads and other private militias) – "Beef" (large landowners raising cattle) - and "Bible" (the neo-fundamentalist Pentecostals, homophobic and misogynistic). Among the most enthusiastic supporters of the dismissal of Dilma was the deputy Jairo Bolsonaro, who dedicated his vote to the officers of the military dictatorship and specifically to Colonel Ustra, a known torturer. Among the victims of Ustra was Dilma Rousseff, at the time (in the early 1970s) an activist in an armed resistance group, as well as my friend Luis Eduardo Merlino, journalist and revolutionary, who died under torture in 1971 aged 21.

The new President Michel Temer, inducted by his acolytes, is himself involved in several affairs, but has not yet been the subject of a review. During a recent survey, Brazilians were asked if they would vote for Temer as President: 2% responded favorably.

In 1964, big demonstrations "with God and the family for freedom" prepared the ground for the coup against President João Goulart; this time new "patriotic" crowds incited by the press have been mobilized to demand the

removal of Dilma, and in some cases a return of the military. Composed mainly of white people (the majority of Brazilians are black or mixed) from the middle classes, these crowds have been convinced by the media that this is about “the fight against corruption”.

What the tragedy of 1964 and the farce of 2016 have in common is hatred of democracy. The two episodes reveal the profound contempt of the dominant classes in Brazil for democracy and the popular will. Will the “legal” coup go ahead with minimal hassle, as in Honduras and Paraguay? That is not so sure - the popular classes, social movements and the rebellious youth have not said their last word yet.