

## The republic in crisis and future possibilities

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**Abstract** *This text gives a brief reconstruction of the process of impeachment of Brazil's President Dilma Rousseff, which was a 'coup' effected through parliament, and situates it at the end of three periods of politics in the Brazilian republic: the first, broader, and democratizing; the second, the age of the PT (Workers' Party) as the force with the hegemony on the left; and the third, shorter, the cycle of its governments. Together, these phases constitute a crisis of the republic, although not a rupture of the country's institutional structure, nor a 'State of Exception'. The paper puts forward three main issues: the developmentalist project implemented by the governments of the PT, in alliance with Brazil's construction companies; the role of the judiciary, and in particular of 'Operation Carwash'; and the conflict-beset relationship between the new evangelical churches and the LGBT social movements. The essay concludes with an assessment of the defeat and isolation of the left at this moment, and also suggests that democracy, in particular, could be the kernel of a renewed project of the left.*

**Key words** *Political cycles, Impeachment, Left, democracy, Development*

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## Isolation and impeachment

Brazil is at present immersed in one of the most serious crises of its history. A long cycle of democratization, beginning in the 1970s with the struggle against the military dictatorship that started in 1964, came to a close – accompanied by the end of a cycle in which the uncontested hegemony of the Brazilian left was held by the Workers' Party (*Partido dos Trabalhadores* - PT), and has come to the end of its electoral cycle, with the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff. The economy is going badly, and the country is now making retrograde steps<sup>1-3</sup>.

Dilma Rousseff, politically unskilled – especially compared to her mentor Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva – made innumerable errors during her periods in government. The effect was to alienate most of society, in particular the middle classes (doctors, scientists, a large part of the judiciary), and also of the ascending poorer classes, as well as the fact that she and the PT found themselves, at the end, facing their principal allies as opponents: initially the Brazilian Socialist Party (*Partido Socialista Brasileiro* – PSB), and later the Brazilian Democratic Movement Party (*Partido do Movimento Democrático Brasileiro* – PMDB). Many people still argue that, from the societal point of view, the central problem was to have based the project of the PT on consumption, thus preventing politicization of the rising poorer sectors. Others, on the contrary, complain about the massive demonstrations of 2013, in which thousands of young people from all over the country spread into the streets, with a very fluid range of discontents and demands. These analysts understand those demonstrations to have been in opposition to Rousseff and the PT – in this author's opinion this point of view tends to indicate a certain political 'autism' on the part of the PT.

The fact is that Rousseff and the PT did not in reality succeed in giving responses to a context that was both intricate and challenging. As a result they lost the support of agents that place themselves in the center of the political spectrum, allowing them to incline toward the right. As if this were not enough, the situation of the Brazilian economy was worsening, due to the global economic situation, and also to the mistakes that the President herself made in her first period of office. Further, having run a campaign that polarized the political debate, positioning herself more to the left than she had previously, even before taking office in her second government Rousseff adopted the adjustment policies of Aécio Neves,

her adversary from the PSDB party. Thus, she lost a considerable part of the social base that elected her. Finally, she had also to contend with the permanent damage produced by 'Operation Carwash', which located a vast scheme of corruption in Petrobras – the national oil company and an icon of Brazilian development – during the administrations of the PT, in which the party participated, together with the PMDB of Temer, and especially the *Partido Popular* (PP – of the center-right), although part of the left argue that there was a selectivity in the investigations.

The event that sealed the fate of the Rousseff government, bringing the PT cycle to an end, was a *parliamentary coup*. The country is now disturbed, by an impeachment process that was clothed in legality, but which a significant part of the population regard as illegitimate. On the other hand it is true that the majority of the population did support it (although, also, without any affection for the Vice-president, Michel Temer, of the PMDB, who took over as President). There was, however, no 'rupture of the country's institutional fabric', and the impeachment went ahead along exactly the same lines as the case which had previously deposed President Fernando Collor de Mello in the 1990s – who was even more unpopular, and politically isolated at the end of his government. The proceedings against Collor were in part what provided legitimacy for their recent repetition. As a parliamentary coup, the impeachment is in no way similar to nor compares with the military coup of 1964, nor the 'regime of exception', as some would like to argue, nor even with any adequate definition of a 'coup-d'état'. Nor should it be seen as a process of atavistic throwback for Brazil – in which democracy is unable to develop due to a perverse and peculiar historic inheritance. In reality, the regime of accumulation that is capitalism is at present polarized, inequalities are increasing and the welfare state is receding where it was put in place – all over the world, democracy is being restricted.

But this did not mean that the impeachment process was not traumatic. It was, apart from anything else, initially conducted by Eduardo Cunha, Chair of the lower house of Congress, and a sinister figure: he was removed from office after doing the dirty work that was expected of him, and finished up being imprisoned on suspicions of corruption, which then expanded to include obstruction of justice, and other issues. Added to this is the phenomenon that does not escape the population's observation, that a large part of the motivation for the impeachment was the desire

to put a brake on Operation Carwash before it reached and, more destructively and more deeply, overwhelmed politicians of the PMDB, the PSDB and other groupings. One of the basic objectives of the coup against Rousseff – sacrificing the PT – was, for many political agents, in fact the need to escape justice, and indeed prison, and the agenda of the neoliberals joined up with this as a secondary goal, even though it was a priority for the leaders of Brazilian business, and for international capital.

These are the basic outlines of the current political context. However, the problems are certainly much deeper. To start with, the forces of the center-right and the right have nothing to offer other than a resumption of a more pitiless economic neoliberalism and a more restricted social liberalism (based on politics focused for the poorest people in the population). The Temer government and its PMDB party until recently were striving to avoid adoption of a hard adjustment and embrace of that neoliberal agenda (initially establishing limits on spending for health and education, science and technology, and government workers' salaries; reforms of the social security system and the labor laws; even though the fragilization of Petrobras and the opening of the Pre-Sal oil deposits layer to foreign companies were already in progress). But the defeat of the left, and especially of the PT, in the 2016 municipal elections have smoothed the way for them to adopt the neoliberal adjustment. Further, it was what they promised to the leaders of business, and what the international agencies are expecting and hoping for. This seems to be the only thing that the PSDB has, in its turn, to propose: a program that is still more restricted than the one that Fernando Henrique Cardoso (its principal leader) put into practice in his two presidential terms. The new directions proposed by the PMDB, for their part, established “a bridge toward the future”, with a clear, though implicit, influence of the ‘public choice’ school, with their denunciation of so-called ‘rent-seekers’, and neoliberal economic viewpoint<sup>4</sup>. To distance critics, more explicit social-liberal policies, focused on the poorer parts of the population, were added at a second stage<sup>5</sup>. All of this indicates that we will have a long and difficult interval ahead of us, even if the neoliberal project comes to be modulated due to the brutal budgeting restrictions which are already being projected as a function of, indeed, their own proposals.

Nothing is very clear in this moment – other than the fact that the morbid symptoms of de-

composition of the present leadership continue to be visible in various dimensions, with the threat of retrograde movements in terms of civilization hanging in the air. Clearly, this has to do with Brazil's current situation of economic difficulty and stress, but it goes a lot further than that. The corruption and the illegitimacy of the political system are visible, and are demoralizing. On the other hand there is a social energy that seeks ways to express itself in the contrary direction, without yet having found where to flow and develop itself fully. Some people suggest that in the present situation one is seeing a terminal crisis of the ‘New Republic’. This is an exaggeration. The Republic's institutions and indeed its horizon of imagination and of rights remain, but there is without doubt a *crisis of the republic* which we need to recognize could, unfortunately, be overcome by a move in a frankly anti-popular direction. It is worth noting that the Brazilian crisis and the debacle of the PT party are taking place in a context of general attrition of the left in Latin America. It is possible that a period of sub-continental hegemony of the center-right may be opening, with a corporate discourse.

#### **The issue of development and the struggles within the dominant classes**

Let us start with the idea of development. Cardoso sought to implement a moderated variant of neoliberalism, with social brushstrokes, and also deepen Brazil's involvement in the global economy in the direction of a re-primarization which improved our semi-peripheral position. He had the virtue of combating uncontrolled inflation. Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, on taking over the presidency, followed a similar route, but as from the 2008 crisis, finished up adopting a more state interventionist model with anticyclical policies, and also took a bet on the development of the Pre-Salt oil deposits and of the oil industry to re-launch the Brazilian economy. A ‘neo-developmental’ approach took shape, and this was deepened in Rousseff's first government. Without planning nor effective discussion with society, full of errors and after a conflict with financial capital without social support, the new ‘economic matrix’, and what was called the ‘developmentalist approach’, both sank beneath the waves.<sup>6</sup>

This ‘neo-developmental’ had at its center the not very clear proposal for an alliance between the PT Party and the major Brazilian contractors, especially Odebrecht – for develop-

ment of a capitalism that would give power to the party and economic muscle to those companies, and also to important sectors of agribusiness. In practice, however, this policy came up against conflicts within the dominant classes themselves.

An element to be highlighted in the present scenario is, clearly, the imprisonment of the owners and directors of contractors involved in corruption schemes of Petrobras which were brought to light by the 'Operation Carwash' investigation, with the open support of the leading media, and silence from other sectors. It is thus worth looking at the relationships between the various fractions of the bourgeoisie itself, which were very much fractured at this moment.

Not long ago it would have been difficult to imagine – essentially until the arrival of Lula in the presidency – that those companies would have been at risk, because of corruption. Further, it would have been almost impossible to suppose that the Globo Group (previously called *Organizações Globo*) – which today expresses the main organic intellectual components of a large part of the Brazilian bourgeoisie and is in a manner of speaking its *de facto* principal political party (as is usually the case with the communications media in contemporary Latin America<sup>7</sup>) – would give its support to the operations of the judiciary and would promote continuous exposure in the media of the owners and directors of those companies. It is important to highlight that the Marinho family, owner of the Globo Group, is, according to Forbes, the richest family in Brazil, with net worth of US\$28.9 billion (followed by the owners of Banco Safra, and the Ermírio de Moraes family); and after that followed mainly by bankers (Salles, Villela, Aguiar, Setúbal), owners of construction companies (Camargo, Odebrecht) and representatives of agribusiness (Maggi, and Batista [no relation of Eike Batista]<sup>8</sup>). After all, these people are some of the principal representatives of Brazilian capital, and all the indications are that there is an image of them carrying out this type of transaction of appropriation of national revenue through over-invoiced works for a very long time.

Although it is known that in Brazil we have what is called "connection capitalism"<sup>9</sup>, in which the state and companies are closely involved with each other, in this case through construction contracts but in a more general way, also involving decisive action by the BNDES – although this does not necessarily always presuppose corruption it can also be said that it is present in several transactions, as the case of Petrobras indicates.

Now this has necessarily come to a halt, although the volumes of lending and the involvement of the BNDES in the ownership and management of the companies has increased accentuatedly during the governments led by the PT, giving an impulse to the capitalist sectors of Brazil, which in some cases includes the choice of 'national champions', and their internationalization. In reality, although some sectors of the economy have been de-nationalized with the processes of privatization of the Cardoso period and the process of purchase of companies continues in various areas, the internal Brazilian bourgeoisie remains vigorous<sup>9,10</sup> – but, clearly, divided.

It is known that the civil engineering sector, led by Odebrecht and other giant companies, had great support from the Lula governments, that the programs of major works and infrastructure favored them, and that they expanded their areas of operation. The sector has been presenting itself as one of the most internationalized faces of Brazilian capitalism, with multi-million dollar contracts in Latin America and indeed in Africa, and also in other regions of the world. Could it be that this alone is capable of generating a climate of belligerence against it by some factions of capital that do not receive the same treatment and support? Perhaps. But the fact is that the hegemony of financial capital has not really been changed, and it continues to have, in general, high profitability, capturing large portions of Brazil's national wealth (in spite of the ill-prepared standoffs against it during the first Rousseff government, in which she came out the loser).

Agribusiness and mining received an increasingly favorable treatment. This took place through the agricultural policy and the policy on federal government lands, including in relation to the indigenous peoples, who have been massacred as never before since the opening of Brazil to democracy; but also by the support of the BNDES and the proposal of the Mining Code, which delivers vast spaces to large Brazilian and foreign companies. This is to say nothing of the disastrous measures to provide relief of taxation (which accompanied the neoliberal line of argument that Brazil's problem was the costs that the private sector faces, even though this has not taken the form of restriction on increase in the price of the workforce). These provisions to lighten companies' costs could have amply favored industry, if they had had a counterpart investment by the companies that borrowed money cheaply, especially from the Brazilian Development Bank

(BNDES) – which did not happen<sup>11-13</sup>. The issue appears, however, to be above all political.

While all the interests benefited in some way or another from the support of the BNDES, the location of the problem seems to be in the idea of a deeper alliance between governments led by the PT and the contractors. It is one thing to take advantage of cheap credit and the schemes that have been set up for misappropriation of money from the state companies and from the state in general. It is another to construct, based on this, a more systematic and lasting alliance of a political nature, including from the point of view of a national project in which both have a central position. This option turns out to be unacceptable to other factions of the bourgeoisie. One could try to find the finger of the United States in the attack on the contractors, on the basis that they were occupying spaces that in principle should be reserved to companies of the US, but there is no concrete evidence for this. The line is clearly drawn: Take advantage of opportunities and make profit, yes; deeper alliances, though, never – since they would constitute a view of organization of the society and of the state that would contradict what the sectors of the bourgeoisie with greater capacity for leadership are projecting for the country, that is to say, according to all the indications: a return to a neoliberalism that is more thoroughbred and radical.

These companies will not, however, cease to be one of the pillars of Brazilian capital – they will continue to be economically, socially and politically powerful. They will have two options: either (i) accept and absorb the fact that the role of political leadership in Brazilian capitalism is denied to them; or (ii) seek to resume a protagonist position in whatever way possible, in whatever project provides the opportunity. Either way it is certain that there will be profound scars, and it is probable that the relationships between these factions of the bourgeoisie will never be the same again.

What is there to be done with a development project that today seems more like a mirage than a possibility, with Latin America once again being thrust back into the past? What coalition can leverage a project that redefines the challenge and proposals to overcome it? The idea of a neo-developmental movement that is strong appears not to be sustainable, but without science and technology, and without a certain degree of re-industrialization, Brazil will drift further away from the countries of the center and from others, in particular China, on the semi-periphery,

which in one way or another have been managing to get their development going. In Latin America, what prevails is *de facto* liberalism, and in the final analysis, the influence of the United States and the historic links of the local bourgeoisies with the countries of the center of the capitalist system clearly have a decisive role.

### Democracy and justice

Democracy in Brazil, starting from the impeachment crisis, is not going well. This has brought the judicial system into the front line, where it is now a highlight of the current context. Dealing with this major system today in Brazil is a prickly task. When this question is combined with the crisis of the political system, the problem becomes even more prickly.

A simple response to the reality of the country would accuse the state of being an apparatus of the bourgeoisie, resuming a Marxist reading that does not even make any use of the theoretical advances that can be found in the works of authors like Gramsci and Poulantzas, who see in the state and in society a field of struggles for hegemony. This apparatus, according to the restricted argument, is currently turned against the left, with its deep reserves of strength, and making the best of the small errors committed by the PT and its allies in the struggle to improve the living conditions of the Brazilian people (and for some, not even those errors are taken at all deeply into consideration).

A second point of view opens with a question: Why have the Federal Public Attorneys (MPF) and the Federal Police (PF) – which were never homogeneous and, at least in the case of the former, had strong links with the PT when in opposition, promoting many accusations against the PSDB and against bourgeois personalities such as Daniel Dantas – now thrown themselves against exactly that same PT? As well as the misappropriations of funds connected with corruption, in which the PT did in fact get involved, the hypothesis has been raised that it was precisely Lula's lenience in relation to these scandals that involved the PSDB (especially the *Banestado* episode, in the 1990s), that produced such a negative effect. According to this argument, by blocking investigations, Lula aroused the ill will and indeed the ire of these corporations to which is added, in particular, the Federal Police – which his government (following a trend that was present in the last of the Cardoso years) did in fact help to equip and develop<sup>14,15</sup>. In reality,

the world of Brazilian law is today very complex: it has been democratized, but it continues to be very stratified and to be subject to little external control, probably due to some mistakes by the legislators of the 1988 constitution in shaping it. In general, it looks as if the families that hold on to the positions of highest prestige are those that have occupied them already for a very long time. This applies especially to the judges and lawyers, while the public attorneys' offices and the legal aid attorneys, for example, are less 'elitist' (and, also, have a higher proportion of women). Among lawyers, the broad-based national and state-level structure of the Brazilian Bar Association (*Ordem dos Advogados do Brasil* – OAB), in reaction to the proliferation of doubtful-quality law faculties, uses the exam for admission to the profession as a way of eliminating professionals who are supposedly little qualified. It in turn is controlled by the large law offices and the lawyers with the greatest prestige in the country. It has an enormous power over the general structure of the judiciary system<sup>16,17</sup>.

Further, the operators of the judiciary today form a group of public servants without parallel in Brazil – with an income (legal and semi-legal, legitimate and illegitimate) that makes them part of at least the higher middle class, as well as having the lack of external control which today, in spite of the existence of the National Council of Justice (*Conselho Nacional de Justiça* – CNJ), still seems to characterize the corporation as a whole. In the Federal Public Attorneys' Office alone, 50% of the attorneys and sub-procurators are paid more than the ceiling of R\$ 33,700.00 (the salary of the Chair of the Federal Supreme Court (STF), and many in reality earn almost double this<sup>18</sup>. Could this – if it is indeed true, let us underline – explain an anti-PT bias on the part of the more or less significant sectors of the judiciary due to this insertion of 'class'? Perhaps in part yes, although a preemptory affirmation would require a great deal more study – although this alone would not explain an apparent change in the points of view of these operators. Could this be explained by the middle classes having distanced themselves from the PT, or even having become opponents of the PT, in particular because (as many suggest or affirm loudly though without any basis in fact or argument) of the ascension of the poorest classes under the Lula and Dilma governments? There is a certain plausibility in these theories, but when applied directly to the judiciary, they are lacking precisely because if there is any group that has not been threatened by this ascension, it would

be those corporations, which are very privileged and well-off today. That is to say, the first of these two theses negates the second, and vice-versa, even though some grain of truth can be found in both, to the effect that a possible bias on the part of the upper middle class might project itself against union leaders and militants of the left.

It is worth underlining, however, that on innumerable occasions judges and members of the public attorneys' office have taken openly democratic and progressive positions (without necessarily having a commitment to the status quo of the left). Indeed, it is impossible also to suppose that the idea that the greater or large part of the Brazilian judiciary is conservative is false. More studies would be necessary for us to have a clearer view of the situation. If liberalism appears to have the hegemony in the judiciary, it is not necessarily neoliberalism, but often a recognition of the value of the Constitution and of rights – by a group taking the view referred to as 'neo-constitutionalism'. This would be in spite of the disagreements as to the validity of this point of view, and as to whether or not it tends to add to identification of Brazilian law – arising as it does from European continental civil law, the common law of the Anglo-Saxon matrix – and thus increases its flexibility, with a certain positive degree of judicialization of politics and social relations<sup>19-22</sup>. In the case of corporations for which the very functioning of the apparatus of the state – with honesty and universalism, in principle, according to the 'ideological' elements in general so strongly present in these collectives – and the policy, internal to itself and external, in society, are perceived as so important, there are many factors that intervene and have to be taken into account. If to this is added the idea that the PT governments had taken corruption even further, institutionalizing it – which seems to be the perception of at least some of the sectors – the situation is severely aggravated, in spite of these (neo)patrimonialist schemes, which involve state and society, having existed in Brazil for centuries, in all their severity in devaluation of citizenship, and theft from the state.

An effectively republican, democratic conception grounded on the defense of the State of Rule of Law, which is today more than necessary, cannot omit to accentuate the combat of this type of neopatrimonialism – which has nothing 'traditional' in it, and is linked directly to the modernization of Brazil<sup>7</sup>. It is not by chance that the large contractors are fundamental protagonists of it. But it is no good disrespecting individ-

ual guarantees so as to guarantee what would be the rights of society, as is sometimes argued. Two wrongs do not make a right.

The current prominence of the judiciary began with 'Operation Carwash'. This began in 2014, casually, with an investigation of money laundering involving a gas station in Curitiba, Paraná State, and evolved to discover a major scheme of corruption, for campaign financing, but also for personal enrichment, in Petrobras. The PP, the PMDB and the PT were the most affected parties. The office of the Procurator General of the Republic, responsible for upholding the institutions of the republic, is the engine of the operation, mobilizing the Federal Public Attorneys, as its apex (the procurators remain independent, however). They have also been extracting information about other schemes of corruption and about congressmen of all the parties, including in relation to the present President of the Republic, Michel Temer. Part of the problem is that those who have the privilege of 'special jurisdiction' may be judged only by the Federal Supreme Court. In reality, with the PT having been seriously hit, and former President Lula himself becoming a defendant at first instance in the area of jurisdiction of the judge Sérgio Moro, there is an enormous pressure to close off Operation Carwash once and for all, and to 'stop the bleeding' (as an important figure of the PMDB expressed it in a recorded conversation). Thus, the unilateralness that is being flagged in this operation will be confirmed, even if only *a posteriori*.

Once more, it will be easy to criticize the judiciary and what often comes across as its elitism. If it is not yet clear how this story will end, it is even less easy to understand the workings of the Federal Public Attorneys' Office. This is a corporation that has strengthened itself greatly, benefitting from great functional independence and having shown strong political willfulness and initiative, characteristics which combine with the view that in Brazil civil society is weak, 'lacking the strength, of itself', to defend its rights (the 'unshakable' rights, under the Constitution) against the state<sup>23</sup>. Until now one of the few cracks in the facade that has enabled us to get a view of the internal political evolution of this corporation – which is very powerful externally, and closed – is the letter in which former Justice Minister of Rousseff's government, Eugênio Aragão<sup>24</sup>, previously a close ally of the present Procurator-General, Rodrigo Janot, lets off steam. Strangely, what would appear to be a joint action to give effectiveness to the Procuratorship-General of the Re-

public – which was always kept shackled by the PSDB governments – dissolved at this moment, for reasons that are still unclear, whether because Aragão and the PT wanted to pressure Janot to preserve the party and the contractors (which, the argument would say, would be to preserve the Brazilian economy), or because he did not like the methods of the operation which, according to critics, involve abuses. If there are by chance any abuses, this is a long way from characterizing a 'regime of exception' – which, if we were to take the argument seriously, would have been the situation at all times in Brazil, where violation of citizens' constitutional guarantees is unfortunately a reiterated aspect of reality (except when it is a case of powerful citizens).

However, what this produces is once again the isolation of the left. For the purpose of this alliance and the promotion, clearly a restructuring of forces is insinuated. The death of the Supreme Court rapporteur of the Operation Carwash case, Teori Zavascki, also, at the very least, holds up the process. Even so, the internal aim and project of the Public Attorneys' Office itself should not ever be left out of account. This is why Operation Carwash continues to go forward, especially as a result of the plea-bargain accusation against Brazil's largest contractor, Odebrecht, which has the effect of including the entire spectrum of the political system, including the 'tribal chiefs' of all the parties. The possibility of an accusatory plea bargain by Cunha could also gravely destabilize the Temer government. Beyond this, fundamental tasks continue to be: (i) achieving a more fine-tuned control of the police; (ii) strengthening the State of the Rule of Law; (iii) ensuring that the Public Attorneys are impartial and operate with public discretion, at any level; and (iv) guaranteeing and amplifying rights<sup>25</sup>.

Frequently one hears it said that the judiciary in Brazil at this moment has a vocation of the 'Pretorian' type and is wanting to dominate the political scenario. Indeed, the situation in which there is great fragility in the political system, and corporations like the military come to the center of the scene and lay their hands on power, is a known phenomenon. The classic example of this is the discussion by Marx<sup>26</sup> about the Bonapartism of the years 1840-1850 in France, at the moment of implosion of the political system and crisis in the relationship in the French Parliament between the representatives and those represented. Historically, military coups crystalize the definition of this type of crisis and its consequences, especially in Latin America.

The crisis of the Brazilian political system at this moment – since the demonstrations of 2013 – is indeed an acute one. It has affected all the political forces. Electoral financing by companies – now prohibited by the Supreme Court – has led them to a situation of total distancing from citizens, which in the case of the PT has been worsened by an enormous hubris in the exercise of power, not even taking the care to maintain much dialog, much less public dialog, with the organizations that traditionally provided them with support. In reality, the system seeks to escape any social pressure – of which the impeachment itself is in part the expression, even if the population desires it, its execution serving to protect the groups which have been in power longest.

In this author's view, insisting on a supposed Pretorian point of view by the judiciary would be to take the argument too far, in spite of a certain voluntarism by the federal public attorneys and, in some sectors, inspiration from the Clean Hands ('*Mani Pulite*') Operation of Italy<sup>27</sup>. Is true that the judiciary, in particular as a result of the weakness and demoralization of the political system, has assumed a significant protagonism. But it does not aim to take over power and govern. Many in the federal public attorneys' offices may be assuming for themselves the role of moralizers of the system and radical combatants of corruption, but it is unlikely that they will go beyond this. Not, indeed, even if they wanted to: the fact that the political system is beginning to react and trying in fact to block the next steps of the operation demonstrates the judiciary's frailty as a political instrument. It remains to be seen how the situation will evolve, especially as a result of the accusations already made, or which have yet to be made. If it is true that the Public Attorneys' Offices see themselves as "the political agent of the law"<sup>15</sup>, this does not mean that they act as substitute for the political system or prevail over it.

In any event, it is clear that for Brazil to overcome these impasses a major rearrangement and renovation of the political system is necessary. The parties have suffered significant wear and tear – starting with the PT. Since June 2013 a large quota of their energy has been invested in the effort to insulate themselves and neutralize the challenges launched by citizens. The reforms that are being proposed, in the electoral system and in terms of barrier clauses, and forcing the return of electoral financing by companies (prohibited by the Supreme Court), as well as an amnesty for those who used illegal undeclared cash

income for electoral purposes, seek exactly the contrary: to keep the political system closed and ensure the hegemony of the large parties. All the smaller parties, such as the Socialism and Liberty Party (*Partido Socialismo e Liberdade* – PSOL) and the Sustainability Network (*Rede Sustentabilidade*), for example, would be outside the parliament and deprived of public funds. A conservative way out of the crisis would try to make this a permanent reality, but it seems to us to be a definite recipe for further problems some years ahead – since rebuilding the bridges between the political system of society and the political system of the state will not be an easy task, if indeed there is any political will for it. The risk is obvious: That under a democratic structure we might see an *advanced liberal-oligarchical regime* becoming stronger, under very limited democratic clothing, which, in alliance with the oligopolized large media and financial capital, might cause the maximum possible restriction on the role of participation by the populace.

If the transition from the military regime to democracy in the 1980s left certain questions ill-resolved, and restrictions on participation by the population, the direction of that democratization has continued to be dominant until recently. The very ascension of the PT to power was an expression of this, transforming that period of mobilization into "institutionalizing citizenship". The process at this present moment tends in the opposite direction, although this has not been fully crystalized and there is a certain social standoff, since the population does not appear to be happy to accept the subtraction of social rights that it perceives as being intended to impose upon it. However, in spite of the weakness of the organized left today, there is sedimented in the mind of the population the notion that they have rights and, in part as a fruit of the progress made by the coalition governments led by the PT in social matters, probably a certain minimal standard of living for the population as a whole should be obeyed. The situation in fact continues to be fluid, and its final direction has not at all been decided, although the initiative is clearly with the forces of the right, including with elements of police repression, beginning to appear openly.

What will happen will depend on whether we succeed in forcing the present cycle, the outline of which is currently being delineated more precisely, more in the direction of democracy than oligarchy.



### Social and cultural pluralism

One subject that has mobilized a lot of, generally acid, argument in Brazil is the tension between the evangelical Christian movements, with their strong participation in politics, and the issues of pluralization of the family, and sexuality, as evidenced by the LGBT militancy and feminism which, now revived and rejuvenated, has re-emerged strongly in recent years, and also in relation to the question of abortion. There is reason for a brief commentary here, since this is an issue with very great negative potential; many point to it as being central in the current 'wave of conservatism'<sup>28</sup>.

There are in reality many variations between the evangelical groups – as there are between Catholics, in spite of the formal unity of that religion, who are sometimes extremely conservative. Thus, one should not think that the former present themselves in a politically or electorally uniform way. But the strength of the machines of their churches and common positions on many issues should not be left out of account – north-eir frequent statements of a conservative or even reactionary inclination in Congress, in particular when moral issues are at stake. One should in any event highlight the Brazilian Republican Party (*Partido Republicano Brasileiro*– PRB), which is directly linked to the *Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus* ('Universal Church of the Reign of God'), which appears to have its own, and vigorous, political project<sup>17,29</sup>. At the same time social pluralization, and the pluralization of identity that we find today in Brazilian society – of which, indeed the emergence of the evangelical religions is an expression – is channeled in part by the pluralization of gender identities, forms of family structure and sexuality, and also, in certain currents, even taking the form of an opposition to feminism. Conflicts are inevitable, also with the Catholics, without needing necessarily to be antagonistic. Further, there is space for transformations over time, such as those that happen in the confluence between evangelicals, Catholics and those that are exploring forms of sexuality which at least until recently were not prevalent.

One can argue that this agenda of customs and rights should not be the center of the progressive agenda. According to this argument, it has the power also to divide, unlike the economic and social questions, which have a greater capacity for bringing people together into groups. While this indeed has a basis in truth, it is necessary to be clear that its abandonment is not a

feasible solution. There is no reason to expect or suppose the abandonment of the agenda, on the other hand, due to the anxiety to win the support of the other, nor to accept a position of attack if the other does not accept the agenda of those movements. In one way or another, evangelicals, on the one side, and on the other side LGTB movements and individuals whose ways of living are different from those accepted as essential by the majority of religions, need to converse, even if only to disagree, which is not always the case in practice. A platform that unifies all is impossible – there will continue to be contradictions – but common agendas can be constructed.

While pluralism can have a democratizing aspect, if badly treated it can fragment and generate standoffs in which violence – physical and symbolic – prevails. Whatever is the case, it is inevitable in contemporary Brazilian society. It is necessary to articulate it politically for it to have progressive productivity, within a wider struggle for rights.

### Looking toward the future

In spite of the media and of the business leaders, the legitimacy of the Temer government is low, and its stability is arguable. It is true that the PMDB succeeded in electing the majority of mayors throughout Brazil, but basically small towns, and making use of clientelism. The weakness of the left is even more evidence, with powerful defeats of the PT all over Brazil, although the PSOL has made some advances in these elections and the Brazilian Communist Party (PCdoB) has maintained some strongholds. The Democratic Labor Party (*Partido Democrático Trabalhista* – PDT), with the presence of its potential presidential candidate Ciro Gomes, maintained strength in the northeast, inclining itself to the center-left, but the *Rede* Party, under the leadership of Marina Silva, has not succeeded, at least for now, in opening a new field in the center of the political spectrum.

The PSBD gained a significant strength – surprising in its intensity – in the present municipal elections. This was above all, but not only, in the state of São Paulo, under the leadership of governor Geraldo Alckmin, who, we note, was only moderately involved in the mobilization for impeachment (very probably he will be the party's candidate for the presidency). The DEM (*Democratas*) Party, a former stronghold of the military dictatorship; the PP (profoundly hit by the Petrobras scandal), also of the right; the Bra-

zilian Socialist Party (PSB), currently located in a center-right position; and the PRB and its evangelical base – among several others– complete the multifaceted current picture of the political system. At this moment it is, overall, strongly inclined to the right, including some elements trying to constitute a militant base in society, like the Free Brazil Movement (MBL), which has been important since the campaign for impeachment.

Finally, the negative view that a large part of the population have today of politics has expressed itself in a higher number of abstentions, and null and blank votes, especially affecting the electorate on the left. Whether a re-legitimization of the political system could come from a return to a leading role for the PSDB remains to be seen. An example is the city of São Paulo, a stronghold of the PSDB, where João Dória was elected Mayor in the first round – but with only 3,085,187 votes – less than the sum of blank, null votes and abstentions. This also happened with Marcelo Crivella (PRB), who ran against Marcelo Freixo (PSOL) for Mayor of Rio de Janeiro, in a run-off; and there were similar occurrences all over Brazil<sup>30</sup>.

If the press, to wear down the PT, as well as placing itself above the formal political system, has a responsibility in this, and the judiciary has succeeded in marginalizing the professional politicians, that is really their problem – although many political scientists have strangely tried to reverse the equation, talking of the practice of “anti-politics” and even of making it illegal – as if the parties had nothing to do with this and as if unaware that this “anti-politics” is often the desire to create *another* politics, even if the desire finds it difficult to express itself, and conservative sectors frequently find business people to channel this desire.

It is also a fact that the conservative-oriented stabilization that might settle in, from these electoral victories and from the start of the neoliberal reform – with the approval of Constitutional Amendment 241, which froze public spending for 20 years – might be threatened by further progress in Operation Carwash. The crisis continues, and proposals for an indirect election of a new President of the Republic by Congress in 2017 are already circulating, in the event that the government does not survive and/or the Rousseff-Temer ticket turns out to be impugned (as a unit) by the Higher Electoral Court (TSE) for irregularities in campaign financing that have been revealed by the latest plea-bargain accusations.

Whatever happens, a renewal of the left is a project that will take time to be consolidated; and

although elections are important, winning them at any cost should not be a priority, especially at this moment of disorientation and incapacity to establish a clear strategy. The left’s immediate horizon should be to emerge from its current isolation. This means working to build a new cycle in which the political forces of the right do not hold the initiative, or at least one in which a dispute can be once again established. Obviously fighting elections is important, but one should not believe, especially at this moment, that they are everything, or the most important thing, in politics, and for this purpose there is a need to re-establish the capacity for dialog and joint construction, perhaps with a new democratic center helping it to be created.

There are two decisive issues in this context: Democracy, and Development.

Taking *Development* first: The neo-developmentalism has once again shown its limits, and democracy has not been in any way deepened in the last decade, in which the population, also, was not called upon to mobilize. A new model of development is necessary, which is more realistic in the (semi) periphery of liberal capitalism and advanced especially in terms of rethinking the meaning of development itself. This should include the relationship with nature and social equality, without omitting to combat financial capital, and the plunder carried out through the public debt, and also seeking to widen the spaces of autonomy of Brazil and of Latin America. It could be – going against the tide of the generalized financialization of the economy, including social policy – a resumption of the idea of ‘sustainable development’, and based on meeting the demand for social rights by a part of the population (transport, health, education, also with an emphasis on technological development, as Gadelha<sup>31</sup> in part suggests). Before we concern ourselves with labels, it is essential to delineate their concrete outlines in a broad debate with society, as transparent and mobilizing as possible.

This brings into play the second and in reality the most important question to be considered: the question of Democracy.

The limitations of our democracy are evident – indeed, this is a global problem, although it has particularly unattractive outlines in our country. Our most urgent task is to deepen it by popular participation, in all ways and manners, and also through widening of the public sphere and the sphere of debate. It is also decisive for auto-comprehension by the left itself, which needs to become less state-led, although the questions of

how to dispute the state and transform it should not be ignored. To what extent the political parties are an instrument that is capable of operating these changes is a doubtful question, since they increasingly seek links with the state apparatus. It is within the organizations of civil society that this needs, thus, to be articulated. The democratic sphere of imagination has always been to some extent owned by the left – also anti-patrimonialist, in spite of the mistakes to the contrary that have been vocalized in recent times – and intransigent in maintaining the veto of corporate financing of campaigns, and also of democratization of communication and of the public sphere. This is a case of pre-eminence of *egalitarian liberty*, in which all of us have *the same social power* (which includes economic and political power). It is crucial to resume this sphere of imagination, going much further than denunciation of the 2016 impeachment as a coup; and also, to believe in and work for renewal and democratization of parties and the organizations of the populace. A notable example of this is the massive occupations of public schools by secondary students, all over the country, at this moment, as well as what the *Frente Brasil Popular* and the *Frente Brasil Medo* – which bring together various organizations – have shown us. (The latter is in principle closer to new social movements, while the former is more traditionally linked to the PT and the Brazilian Communist Party).

Finally, the question that underlines all this is which coalition can advance a democratic project, grounded on expansion of rights and the quest for a more generous development model. This type of strategic question has always been put to emancipatory thought. It has been lacking in Brazil for a very long time, however – other than the pathetic and ill-starred attempted to create a ‘new middle class’ that would be neoliberal and consumerist, and would be faithful to the PT and its project. Brazil has the following groups:

a vast proletariat of people providing services, poor and largely living in the world of informal markets; traditional middle classes and others who have more recently ascended; an industrial worker class which tends to be fatally shrinking; and rural workers of many types, some of which wish to be seen as ‘peasants’. The country’s dominant classes are divided, and it is not clear what the small and medium-sized businessmen want – they appear to be tired of the economic confusions of Rouseff, of having embraced a more purely neoliberal vision, but will not necessarily be forever imprisoned by it. Further, a large part of the identity and the power of the traditional middle classes comes from their belonging to very important corporations, for example, the judiciary and the medical profession. Unless we wish to go back to a politics of the ‘class against class’ type, in the style of the worst mistakes made by the Third International – or ‘poor’ against ‘rich’, as was tried here, with the results that we now witness – it is fundamental to discover how to hold a dialog with these sectors, how to gain hegemony over one part of them, neutralize another part, and reduce the influence of its more conservative sectors.

A coalition of the left is important, but what is decisive for this is to facilitate the emergence of a new center that is more democratic; if this is not done, Brazil will continue to be a prisoner of the PMDB and of similar forces. Democracy needs much more than this to enable it to be deepened, starting with a refusal of neo-patrimonialist practices of pillaging the state – whether to provide underhand illicit financing of election campaigns, or for personal enrichment – and going on to a change in the content of the relationship between the state and society, and invention of new forms for it to take. This is where the interaction that will create the future of projects for emancipation will happen.

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