

The Anarchist Library
Anti-Copyright



Brazil 2016–17: The Political Crisis and Coup d'État

An Anarchist Analysis

CrimethInc.

CrimethInc.
Brazil 2016–17: The Political Crisis and Coup d'État
An Anarchist Analysis
March 12, 2018

Retrieved on 16th June 2021 from crimethinc.com

theanarchistlibrary.org

March 12, 2018

Contents

Introduction: Governing without the Ballot Box	5
Not a Class Struggle, but a Class Pact	7
The Decline of a Leftist Latin America	9
The Coup: “Fighting Corruption” as a Weapon against Political Enemies	12
A Coup d’État? Revolution, State of Exception, and Why We Say <i>Coup</i>	15
Coup d’état or Revolution?	16
Why We say Coup d’État	17
A Century of Dictatorships Punctuated by Brief Mo- ments of Bourgeois Democracy	19
Coups within the Coup: How the PT Has Improved the State’s Repressive Apparatus	21
From the 2013 Uprisings to the Coup of 2016: How the New Right Rose	25
The Streets in Dispute	25
Conservatives of the World, Unite	28
Episodes of Resistance	32
First Fights and Victories	33
September 7, 2016: We Have Never been Patriots	33
Occupying the Schools	35
General Strike: 2017 Reminds Us of 1917	37
The Bullets of a Police State	39
Conclusion: Direct Action Now!	41
New Terrains, New Fights	41
Beyond Polarization	43
Direct Action Now!	47

of the process of cooptation. They will give us reforms to calm our anger and draw us out of the streets; they will listen to our opinions and even accept some of us into their governments so that we will feel that the system represents us as well. But we should not content ourselves with inclusion or reform. Our goal is to occupy, resist, and organize ourselves to increase our power collectively against all forms of control and oppression. Whether it is an elected government or a government implemented by a coup, no government is an option—no government is legitimate in our eyes.

Dictatorships are worse than democracies, just as coups are worse than elections. But whatever the scenario, we must be ungovernable.

became popular with the new political actors in the streets of Brazil, the newly politicized parts of the population. Soon “occupy everything” became “Occupy the Elections.” Social movements tend to rely on what is familiar when they address themselves to public opinion, for fear of isolating themselves as “too radical.” Even anarchists do so when they use democratic discourses and methodologies such as “direct democracy,” as if this would necessarily lead to anarchy one day. Relying on what is familiar, they embrace a populist tone that is easily digested, and forget that if *acracy* (lack of coercive power) were the same as *demo-cracy* (the coercive power of one group or majority over the rest), we would not need two different words.

We understand that not everyone will choose to struggle against the government and capitalism in a radical way. We need to learn how to engage with and even fight side by side with reformers and those who support governmental parties like the PT. But we cannot forget our position, nor should we fail to point out the systemic and historical problems with the institutions we fight. When we perceive a crisis of representation, we must use this opportunity to promote disbelief in politicians and their institutions as a whole, rather than looking for ways to take over their positions in order to regenerate bourgeois democracy. If we cannot win victories by presenting demands, we should at least take advantage of street protests and conflicts with the authorities to occupy spaces in which we can work with others to develop revolutionary social skills.

No one said this would be easy, or that only a few demonstrations would destroy the state and capitalism. We cannot expect to repeat 1917 or 2013 just by imitating what has worked in the past. We may not be able to do much to influence when major upheavals will happen, but we can always be prepared for when they do. As the movements against rising public transportation fares in 2013 showed, the system learns to deal with new forms of struggle. We have to constantly outmaneuver the state in order to stay ahead

After a groundswell of anarchist and autonomous protest in 2013, Brazil experienced a right-wing reaction that culminated with the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff of the Workers Party (PT). The events in Brazil offer an instructive case study of phenomena that are prevalent elsewhere around the world—indeed, the United States might have experienced something similar had Hillary Clinton been elected. Looking at Brazil, we can identify the dangers of premising social movements on presenting demands to the authorities; we can see how the discourse of “fighting corruption” serves right-wing forces jockeying with left parties to hold state power, while legitimizing the function of the government itself; we can study how right-wing groups appropriate the tactical innovations of anarchist movements, and explore ways to defend ourselves against this. Above all, in a time when left and right parties are engaged in increasingly pitched struggles for control of the state, we have to carve out space for social movements that reject the state itself, resisting the attempts of all parties to manipulate or subordinate us. The Brazilian example offers an important reference point for the challenges and opportunities that face us today.

This analysis picks up where our coverage of social movements in Brazil between 2013 and 2015 leaves off. For more background on popular struggles in Brazil, read our reports on the 2013 uprising and the movement against the 2014 World Cup, and listen to episodes 7 and 25 of the Ex-Worker podcast.

Introduction: Governing without the Ballot Box

In 2016, the Brazilian parliament dismissed President Dilma Rousseff of the Workers’ Party (PT) after charging her with committing “fiscal irregularities” known as *pedaladas fiscais*. On April 17, the impeachment vote at the Chamber of Deputies was

broadcast live on television like a football match: the whole country watched the politicians declare that they had voted in the name of God, Jesus, the Family, good morality and in memory of the torturers and murderers of the Military Dictatorship (1964–1985). At the end of this disturbing spectacle, 367 of the 513 deputies voted for the president to leave office. Dilma Rousseff temporarily stepped down and her vice president, Michel Temer of the PMDB, took over in the interim. Four months later, on August 31, the Senate finally passed the Impeachment by 61 votes to 20 and Temer became president, undertaking a radical restructuring of the entire government and its ministries. It was the end of the PT's 13-year rule, the longest tenure of a political party in the country's presidency since re-democratization.

The deputies and senators who voted to impeach the president are the political spokespeople of Brazil's industrial and agrarian elites, and many of them are also Protestant Christians. The entire process was openly supported by mainstream media and conservative movements in general—the same groups behind the reactionary “anti-corruption” protests that took place in hundreds of cities.

The fall of the PT government ushered in an even worse future for the whole working class as well as for people in peripheries/ghettos, indigenous populations, and black and LGBTQI people. The economic gains from social policies implemented by Lula and Dilma's party are insignificant to the traditional elites. Without Dilma, the PMDB of Mr. Temer and his allies promptly implemented aggressively neoliberal and anti-popular measures to meet the demands of the rich. When Temer took power, he acted as if he had not been elected on the same electoral ticket as Dilma. He started to exercise a mandate and a project of his own, one that represented the political and economic elites who have been used to ruling alone for decades now—with or without a victory at the polls.

These are shallow oppositions that create false dichotomies between groups that have common origins and similar agendas, groups that work together to maintain the control and privileges of the same classes of rulers and entrepreneurs. The only opposition that can make any difference in social struggles is the one between governments and the freedom of all people; between control and self-determination; between representation and autonomy; between hierarchy and anarchy. In a time when it is normal for middle-class youth to feel that being rebellious is primarily a right-wing tendency, the question is how to take part in the social and political struggles of our time in a way that establishes our position as anarchists who are against any kind of government.

Direct Action Now!

In response to the posters calling for “Direct Elections Now,” we assert that our best option is still to take direct action now! To occupy, to riot, to plunder, to organize ourselves to build economic and political structures that guarantee autonomy. At the same time, we must try to spread tactics, strategies, and objectives that strengthen us as a community and release us from the control of the state and the market.

The relationship between direct action and radical politics is not always obvious. As anarchists, we must strive to make this relationship explicit whenever possible. Parties and movements emerged after 2013 with the idea of restoring electoral politics and putting “real representatives” from minorities into government. They did this using slogans like “horizontality,” “autonomy,” and “no political parties.” These words became famous because they were the fundamental principles of the autonomous movements that started the uprisings in 2013. Just as Syriza started small and gained support as the only party that did not condemn the violent protests in Greece in 2008, these movements used the same terminology that

in Brazil may just be the first step of a right-wing breakthrough that will last for years to come. Neoliberalism won a battle by carrying out the coup that took the PT out of the presidency, but the 2018 presidential elections will see the right wing seeking to consolidate its return by selling its project at the polls. The biggest name of this new face of neoliberalism is perhaps João Dória, the mayor and “CEO” of São Paulo. But there is also Jair Bolsonaro, the deputy and military officer who supports the Brazilian and Chilean dictatorships and argues for using torture and the death penalty. He has already stated that if he is elected, congress will be dissolved and there will be a coup. Bolsonaro is in second place in the polls with 16% of voter support, only behind Lula. The notoriously racist, homophobic, and sexist military that he has promised to use is a great threat to all minorities and social movements, as he proposes to declare war on such groups in order to end indigenous territories and quilombolas. This is another example of hate speech and Brazilian fascism that the right wing cultivated during the protests demanding Dilma’s impeachment.

When hate speech is used against minorities and impoverished peoples that benefit from social programs, a considerable portion of society agrees with conservative leaders and their demand for a police state. In this situation, anarchists face the challenge of showing that there are other possibilities.

It is clear that the movements that support such candidates have already given up on the possibility of building collective power. These movements want to hand over control of the political institutions to dictators like the ones who took office in 1964. With each crisis and scandal, these institutions become stronger and stronger. A dictatorship can be worse than a democracy; an explicitly neoliberal government that comes to power by using a state of exception could be even worse than the PT’s social democracy. But we must not leave any doubts: we are against both.

The real opposition of forces in our society is not just right against left, or social democracy against neoliberal imperialism.

But the road leading up to the 2016 impeachment is long and much more complex than the dichotomy between betrayers and betrayed. Before being betrayed by its allies, the PT betrayed its own principles and those of many who supported it in order to take control of the government in the first place. In order to understand the current political crisis in Brazil, we must analyze the political trajectory that brought us here.

Not a Class Struggle, but a Class Pact

The only reason Michel Temer is president of Brazil today is because the PT invited him to serve as Dilma’s Vice President. This move was part of the PT’s strategy to reconcile class conflict. However the plan backfired, and in the end Temer bit the hand that fed him. Like Temer, the big economic interest groups were not absent from Lula or Dilma’s government. Even while the PT was in power, those elites were there behind the scenes cooperating when it was convenient for both parties.

The PT used the clever strategy of class reconciliation to win the 2002 elections. In his “letter to the Brazilian people,” Lula tried to calm the financial market and all those who had feared the victory of a pro-union president. In the letter, he wrote that he intended to respect the state’s commitments to external debt and not to take unilateral measures. As was to be expected, when the leftist PT party gained power, it did not make itself an enemy of the elites, but rather an ally in the process of capitalist development.

During the governments of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (2003–2008) and Dilma Rousseff (2011–2016), Brazil became an emergent figure in the world economy based on primary commodity production, high international prices, the creation of 1.5 million new minimum wage jobs, and granting new purchasing power to the poor chiefly via the expansion of micro-credit (i.e., massive indebtedness for the poor and the lower middle class). Meanwhile, public debt only in-

creased; banks and financial systems were profiting at historically high levels.

What was decisive in this scenario were the favorable conditions outside of Brazil. The 2008 financial crisis had a devastating effect on US and European markets. As a consequence, capital from the central countries—the United States and Europe—was invested in the peripheries. In addition, China continued to grow and became Brazil's most important international partner, buying raw materials and selling industrialized products. This trade partnership provided the resources to implement the massive social programs that relieved 45 million people of extreme poverty. But Lula's intentions were not purely benevolent: he convinced the rich elites that incorporating impoverished regions and peoples back into the economy would stimulate the economy and provide new opportunities for the country's elite to make even more money.

Fiscal programs that facilitated access to personal credit were also introduced around this time. This was a strategic move that expanded the domestic market to benefit excluded populations that had been shaped by more oligarchic politicians for decades, such as Northeast Brazil and most urban poor neighborhoods and favelas. In just a short time, all those people received unprecedented economic benefits. Since the overwhelming majority of the Brazilian population is poor, the Workers' Party secured a solid enough political base to be elected four times in a row.

In the short term, both the rich and the poor had their needs met. The effect was one of social appeasement, causing grassroots social movements to die down. Trade union leaders were elected into government positions and as a result they stopped opposing the federal government's policies, no matter how reactionary they were. Agrarian reform practically ceased when Lula came to power and under Dilma Rousseff's administration, and the demarcation of indigenous lands was the smallest in the history of the democratic era. The PT chose to prioritize the interests of agribusiness and *latifundia* (large landed estates belonging to the wealthy) over

tence depend on illegal relationships, bribery, drug trafficking, tax fraud, and money laundering. They depend on these crimes much more than they depend on voting and democratic elections. In a country like Brazil, where elected governments have never been standard, where coups and dictatorships are the rule, this becomes more obvious. At the same time, this context can offer a fertile ground for fascism and state terrorism.

This leads us to other questions: what should we do when far-right discourses grow in a country in the midst of an undeclared civil war? We do not speak of civil war as a metaphor the way students of French philosophy like to. We're speaking of a state of siege in the Third World, something that the rebels of the northern countries have only had a brief taste of. The Military Police of the state of São Paulo alone killed 459 people in the first half of 2017, the largest number in 14 years. In the same period of time in 2017, the police in the whole United States killed 624 people. There were more violent deaths in Brazil than in the 12 largest war zones in the world between 2004 and 2007. By 2015, the death toll in Brazil was higher than it was in the war in Syria. In August 2017, a corporate newspaper linked to media monopolies created a war editorial board to address the security crisis in Rio de Janeiro: "This is not normal," journalists claimed while covering the conflict between warring factions and violence against the general population. This is likely the first newspaper in the world to create a war editorial board in a country that has not officially declared or recognized a civil war. If fascists take over the institutions that are already perpetrating extreme violence against the population, the results could be catastrophic.

Governments elected with left-wing programs and with the support of traditional social movements in Latin America are losing influence, giving way to alliances with new neoliberal forces that are in turn rejecting pacts with the left. Public opinion seems to be that democratic and electoral processes have already given the left a chance, which they squandered. Episodes like the impeachment

of preventive counterinsurgency. Social programs that include the poor in consumer society and police repression in the communities act in the same way as the movements that aim to prevent the poor from building autonomy apart from the state and the market. The Mexican government did the same thing when the Zapatistas built schools in poor cities: instead of building schools where there were none, the government decided to compete by building schools only in the same cities as the Zapatistas. They offered metal sheet roofs as an incentive to those families that chose to put their children in the state schools. Both the right and the left know that when you ignore poverty, this will ultimately give rise to organized uprisings.

The dividing lines between the right and the left hides what is similar in both of their political projects. The PSDB is usually seen as a right-wing project, on account of being the PT's chief rival. But this polarization obscures the fact that there are far more similarities between these two parties than both would like to admit. Although the PT grew out of a movement with a broad popular support base, both had their origins in similar social-democratic projects and both ultimately became servants of the elites. The PT has maintained relations with social movements and trade unions, bringing them into its government, while basically remaining allied with the industrial elites of the Southeast of the country. However, it was former President Fernando Henrique who proposed implementing the income transfer programs that were later transformed into the *Bolsa Família*. In 2003, the PSDB published a formal complaint about having been prevented from participating in the XXII Congress of the Socialist International held in São Paulo. Even the most conservative of the right wing consider the PSDB to be the "left of the right."

The same corruption was also present in leftist governments. The Lava Jato investigations (at the national level) and the Panama Papers scandal (on a world scale) show what anarchists have always tried to make clear: at their very roots, capitalism and the state are organized by corrupt authoritarian mafias. Their power and exis-

guaranteeing indigenous peoples and peasant families the right to land.

The PT fashioned itself the party of the people, the party that cared for the workers and the poor. But inside the palaces, it shook hands with the conservative, corrupt, and neo-liberal groups that took over the economy while the PT administered social restructuring and public policies. Corruption, bribery and other illegal means were essential for the PT; they became a party as dishonest as any other in power.

The Decline of a Leftist Latin America

In the last two decades, much of Latin America has grown weary of the traditional bourgeois right. This has opened up space for popular left-wing governments to emerge in several countries. Countries such as Venezuela, Bolivia, and Ecuador chose the "Bolivarian" way—a combination of anti-imperialist, anti-neoliberal, and anti-oligarchic positions. This position gained eminence in countries where authoritarian states turned against their populations. Other countries such as Chile, Uruguay, and Brazil formed coalitions between social-democratic and neo-liberal parties, uniting left-wing parties with other center or moderate parties to preserve neoliberal doctrines and the so-called "Washington Consensus." They continue to apply progressive measures, instituting social programs that minimally improve the economic conditions of the poor without ever defying the structures that produce and maintain inequality.

Social programs like the *Bolsa Família* became renowned worldwide. The Lula government counts getting 45 million people out of poverty as one of its greatest achievements. But Bolsa Família is nothing more than a Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) program recommended by financial institutions that serve the rich, such as the IMF. The average 176 Brazilian Reais granted to each family

(about \$55 in US dollars) makes a difference for millions of people who have nothing. However, this sum is petty compared to unemployment benefits and other social programs that are in place in rich countries like France or Germany. Furthermore, this small sum of money does not guarantee that excluded classes will actually be integrated into the economy: it only allows people to purchase consumer goods. It does not guarantee access to housing or higher education, two things that would be more likely to give Brazil's poorest populations the prospect of long-term improvement in their social standing.

The strategic use of these economic and social policies helped Lula come to power and maintain his position. After losing three consecutive presidential elections (1989, 1994, 1998), the PT took a more moderate position. It chose the typical path of social democracy: a socialism that exchanges revolutionary struggle for the electoral contest to control the state and carry out emergency social policies. In practice, this project of governance abandoned the class struggle in order to seek class conciliation that most benefitted the elites. However, the PT made a strategic mistake: they believed that if they governed to benefit the old elite, they would be considered a part of that elite. The elite do not welcome new members and are usually self-sufficient. Even when they worked with right-wing politicians, agribusiness, and industry conglomerates, to the old elite Lula and the PT still represented the image of the working class, of the poor, of black people and leftists.

It was the elite themselves, not the poor classes, who decided to break the pact created by the Workers' Party. They took advantage of this opportunity as soon as they realized it was no longer necessary to maintain their previous agreements. The problem was not that the poor were receiving money, but that the rich were not making enough. The years passed, economic conditions in the rest of the world worsened, and finally the recession hit Brazil. When this happened, Dilma's solution was to try to break the agreements that had provided security for the elites since the early years of the

that made the movement strong and attracted solidarity from the whole country.

On the other hand, our newest political enemies, the conservative and neoliberal right, also benefitted from renewing their tactics. These forces were led by young people who were on the streets at the same time that we were in 2013. By using social media and building political alliances with international parties and institutions, they were able to gain influence by co-opting the discontent of the youth and the middle class. We have to overcome our own limits, but also to watch how rival movements are emerging in order to ensure that our tactics and visions will be more attractive than the promise of security and consumer prestige offered by the right wing.

Beyond Polarization

As the presidential elections of 2018 approach, parts of the left once again tried to sell us the image of Lula as the savior of the poor. Now more than ever, we need reject this kind of narrative. The PT is not a solution for the problems of capitalism. Elections will not guarantee us anything. The class reconciliation that the PT organized to keep the rich in charge of the economy and the parliamentary coup that subsequently toppled Dilma demonstrated beyond a doubt that the ballot is powerless when the oligarchy is determined to take over the State.

There is little difference between how the left and the right treat the poor: they both believe that the peripheries are havens of violence, trafficking, crimes, and disposable bodies. The only state institutions really present in those areas are the police and the army. The innovation of the PT and the Latin American left is to simultaneously combine armed repression with social programs. Programs such as the *Bolsa Família* are compatible with pacification and militarization operations in the favelas, a common form

we can experience victory on occasions when self-determination and radical activities receive community support for maintaining space and resisting the police.

Students quickly recognized who was really on their side and who just wanted to capitalize on their struggles. The student unions that serve as an electoral platform for the youth of the parties were not able to take over the occupations and lead a peace-making dialogue with the government. Right-wing groups that tried to infiltrate schools to spread their agenda or to sabotage the occupations were banished and told never to return. It was necessary to occupy not only the physical structures but also the time and relationships that make those structures function. In establishing radical and horizontal relations, we demonstrated in practice that our goals and our ways of fighting for a better world can overcome the superficial polarization between left and right that dominates the press, social media and our daily lives.

There is tremendous revolutionary potential in occupying buildings and public spaces or any piece of land or capital infrastructure. In addition to disrupting and modifying the function of the tools of productive power and political oppression, using these structures to host our movements, even for a limited time, can be a great opportunity to nurture revolutionary forms of struggle and organization. This can jump-start the accumulation of experience, knowledge, and resources for future struggles. Some of the students who started school occupations in 2015 and 2016 had some contacts and influence from the 2013 autonomous movements, such as the MPL (the Free Pass Movement). But in general, the student movements did not succeed because of traditional movements or parties, nor even autonomous movements that had been organizing together for over a decade, which had been the foundation of the movement in 2013. The student movement was created by the power of imagination and innovation of young people aged 13 to 18, the majority of whom had never participated in any protest or social movement. It was the new blood and the capacity to imagine the unimaginable

Lula era. The pact was no longer enough, and the same elites behind industry, agribusiness, and banks demanded the purest neoliberalism. They quickly got together with their parliamentary allies and reorganized their agenda to impose austerity policies that made harsh welfare and education cuts while at the same time slashing rights and freedoms.

As Temer himself argues, the motions for impeachment began when Dilma refused to accept a neoliberal project known as “A Bridge to the Future,” which was designed by the PMDB in 2015. The plan was to pay back public debt to banks by using money that would otherwise go towards education, health, and social programs. The accusation of corruption came only later, as a more legitimate pretext to overthrow the president. Eduardo Cunha, also of the PMDB, accepted the impeachment request made against Dilma Rousseff in December of that year on accusations of “fiscal irresponsibility” and a possible relationship with the corruption scandal revealed by the huge police operation, Lava Jato. Government approval ratings, which had reached 80 percent three years earlier, fell to just 8 percent after massive attacks against her by the country’s judiciary and by the media. Dilma Rousseff’s exit door was being opened.

This did not happen only in Brazil: the projects of left-wing Latin American governments are losing momentum and it is not surprising that many people have grown tired of waiting for deep social and economic change and are now being seduced by right-wing discourses. Local elites have already attempted coups in Venezuela, Ecuador, and Bolivia. In Honduras and Paraguay, the elites have succeeded in deposing democratically-elected presidents who attempted to implement superficial reforms that didn’t benefit the rich. In Argentina, Cristina Kirchner’s Peronism gave way to the neoliberal Mauricio Macri. Venezuela, the first country to elect a so-

cialist and Bolivarianist¹ president at the turn of the century, has entered into a deep economic crisis that does not seem to have a solution in sight. In Bolivia, Evo Morales, the peasant and indigenous president, disappointed city unions and peasants' movements and lost a referendum that would have allowed the president to run for a third term. By promising true social justice and economic equality, which cannot be delivered within capitalism, the Left fueled a popular disillusionment that will encourage right-wing politicians to bring back pure neoliberalism or worse.

The Coup: “Fighting Corruption” as a Weapon against Political Enemies

“For me there is no doubt that the worst of democracies is always preferable, if only from the educational point of view, to the best of dictatorships. Of course democracy, so-called government of the people, is a lie; but the lie always slightly binds the liar and limits the extent of his arbitrary power. Of course the ‘sovereign people’ is a clown of a sovereign, a slave with a papier-maché crown and scepter.”

-Errico Malatesta

Although many of the politicians in the PT were either under investigation for corruption or had already been convicted of it, nobody could prove that President Dilma was involved in these crimes. The impeachment procedure was an institutional coup d'état disguised as a fight against corruption. Distorted interpretations and manipulations of the laws were used to bring about the annulment of the election in order to bring to power a political program that has not won elections for over a decade.

¹ Venezuela, Bolivia, and Ecuador chose the “Bolivarian” way—a combination of anti-imperialist, anti-neoliberal, and anti-oligarchic positions.

Conclusion: Direct Action Now!

New Terrains, New Fights

The terrain has shifted once again. The forms of struggle that movements have used against the new government show how tactics and strategies have evolved over recent years. We have seen innovations in Brazilian movements since the initial wave of 2013 and 2014. Autonomous movements have contributed to this tactical renewal, the greatest example being the school occupations. However, although it won some minor victories in government reforms in São Paulo, this was not able to stop the Temer administration's amendments nor its austerity policies. A form of fighting might succeed for one year, but nothing guarantees that it will continue to serve in new contexts, regardless of how inspiring and powerful the initial experience was.

Still, occupation seems to be the tactic that has been most effective at producing a collective group of mutual support and autonomy. The fundamental principles of the student movement were the same ones that generalized in 2013: autonomous action, horizontal decision-making, and political unity of student parties and the movements linked to them. Yet the tactics that appeared during the occupations were diverse and quickly changed according to context in an unprecedented way. What began as a wave of discontent in social networks became a movement with marches and occupations that spread rapidly. In the middle of the struggle, it was common for people to leave the occupations to hold rallies, protests, and road blockades, and to organize public lessons and events in schools or on the streets. In 2015 and 2016, occupations succeeded in creating a new political space within schools, with students organizing classes, cleaning, gardening, cooking, resolving conflicts, and sharing methods of dealing with police violence, all while giving new use to a structure created to control and shape the new workforce. Even when our specific demands are not met,

time in his government. The decree, which can only be requested by the president, summoned 1300 Army soldiers and 200 Marines to protect the public buildings of Brasília for a week. After popular pressure from media, the opposition, and the members of the Court, the president revoked the decree the next day. The damage from the May 24 vandalism was estimated to be \$360,000 (less than the \$400,000 that one of the owners of JBS was reported to pay the president every month in tips).

The crowds were powerful and showed resistance. However, the state of exception quickly became the state's go-to strategy, as the Armed Forces were called to take to the streets against an internal enemy just hours after police opened fire on demonstrators with lethal ammunition. Fortunately, no one died in the protests in Brasília. All of this happened on the same day that an operation involving 30 people, including civilian police, soldiers, private security guards, and paramilitaries, invaded a farm occupied by landless workers in Pau D'arco, in the state of Pará. They tortured and executed at least 11 peasants and shot at least 14 in the operation. Extreme cases of state terrorism like this are becoming increasingly common in the country, showing that agrarian conflicts are worsening with the new government's policies. To date, no police officer who shot protesters in Brasília has been arrested; 13 of the police officers involved in the Pau D'arco massacre were not even prosecuted by the courts.

In the middle of the uprisings of 2013, we reported that in the city centers, the police use rubber bullets, but in the peripheries of the cities and the countryside, they use lethal ammunition. On May 24, 2017, we feel on our skin the proof that the bullets would be lethal anywhere that resistance arises against an increasingly permanent state of exception.

Since the elections failed to unseat either Lula or Dilma, the coup was the only way for the opposition to implement social and political measures that were even worse than the social-democratic measures put into place by the PT.

The cause for the coup was political, not ethical. This became obvious when the prosecution failed to prove that Dilma Rousseff had any relationship to the crimes investigated by the Lava Jato operation. This operation, organized by the Federal Police, was an investigation into what became the biggest corruption scandal in Brazilian history. The operation has already indicted 50 politicians from six parties as well as the directors of ten of the largest companies and contractors in Brazil and in the entire world, including the Brazilian company Petrobras. When the police went on to investigate PT politicians, in particular former President Lula, the media made a point of using the investigation to suggest that the PT politicians were the sole forces of corruption in all of politics. This incited street demonstrations that built legitimacy for the coup. The elite had decided that the best strategy would be to put another president in charge and then call off the investigations to spare the rest of the politicians. Perhaps the biggest benefit of the Lava Jato operation has been to show that corruption is inseparable from the capitalist system; it pervades virtually every party and every major business in the country that finances electoral campaigns for the left and for the right-wing parties.

More than half of the lawmakers who investigated the president are also being investigated or have already been convicted of corruption crimes. For example, Deputy Eduardo Cunha, who was responsible for initiating the impeachment process in 2015, was arrested in October 2016 on charges of being involved in bribery and money laundering.

The "fiscal pedals" (the delay in the payment of bank loans used for social programs such as Bolsa Família) are a technique used by many mayors, governors, and almost all former presidents before Dilma. Even the prosecutor of the Federal Public Ministry

used these fiscal pedals. But Dilma was the first to be indicted on criminal charges for doing so. The members of Parliament did not take this into consideration when they voted to impeach a democratically-elected president. Just two days after voting for impeachment, the Senate passed a law that made pedaling a maneuver that is lawful when done by the federal government. After using fiscal pedaling as the main charge against Dilma Rousseff, Congress made it impossible for such accusations to be used against the new president.

The term *corruption* is used only to classify an individual or group as enemies of morality and good manners. The spectacle of corruption thus appeals to “common sense”; it was supported and legitimized by the crowds that took to the streets in protest. Corruption discourse is a political technique that aims to weaken enemies and shield allies. It is a pretext to suspend democratic procedures, distort laws, and ensure that power remains in the hands of a few people without causing anyone to question the system and the corruption that underpins it. By definition, democratic government entails the control of a few people over the rest of the population. The electoral spectacle is used to give legitimacy to this. By nature, democratic regimes are exclusive, authoritarian, and oppressive systems in which our participation and our self-determination are limited at all times by political representation and police repression.

Yet when their agents and institutions openly violate and distort their own laws, this is an indication that we will have many more problems ahead, and that there will be no constitutional rights or majority vote to protect us.

The Bullets of a Police State

The last example of a struggle against the new government and its policies we will address was the biggest and the most tragic. About 50,000 people went to Brasilia on May 24 to protest Mr. Temer’s departure. The occasion was yet another scandal: president Temer had negotiated bribes with the owner of JBS, the country’s largest meat company. This sparked the largest and most intense confrontation yet. Again, the biggest demand was that the president leave office and hold new direct elections. What attracted the most attention was the radical nature of the protests.

Protesters marched toward the police blockades protecting Congress around 1 pm. Members of unions tried to break the barricades and the police attacked with pepper spray. The presence of anarchists and the black bloc gave intensity to confrontations with the troops of Military Police and National Force that lasted more than an hour. The buildings of eight ministries were destroyed and two were set on fire; chemical toilets were turned into barricades while rocks, rockets, and Molotovs were hurled at the police.

From the sound trucks, members of unions and parties asked the “masked comrades” to calm down. But when they realized that the police attack was not going to stop, they, too, started inviting people to resist. When the Ministry of Agriculture building was set on fire, ordinary police officers began firing lethal ammunition at demonstrators. A 64-year-old man was shot in the face and survived with the bullet lodged in his throat. A young man lost his hand due to the explosion of a police concussion grenade. At least 50 people were injured, five of whom had to be hospitalized. At least eight police officers were injured.

In response, president Temer declared the demonstrations illegitimate and used the Law and Order Guarantee decree for the third

The strikes of 1917 began and then generalized after the death of Spanish cobbler José Martínez. During his funeral, 50,000 people ceased working and more protests took place. Days later, more protests, rallies, and looting helped increase support among workers and spread the strike across the country. Some demands were partly conceded, such as wage increases, the reduction of working hours, freedom of association, the end of night work for women, and the end of child labor.

During the 1917 strike, direct actions were powerful and the confrontations were fierce. The death toll from repression is still uncertain, but there are indications that state forces murdered dozens or even hundreds of workers. After this period, the repression of revolutionary unionism, of anarchists and socialists was increasingly brutal. They even constructed a penal colony for political prisoners which operated for four years. Located in the middle of the Amazon rainforest and known as the “Brazilian Siberia,” Clevelândia was a concentration camp for all kinds of pariahs in society, but it was the main destination of anarchists and other rebels imprisoned under the regime of President Arthur Bernardes (1922–1926). Domingos Passos, a well-known black worker and Brazilian anarchist, Colombian writer Bólfilo Panclasta and many other famous names are some of the survivors of Clevelândia prison, where hundreds were taken to suffer torture, forced labor, illness, and death.

The 2017 strike was not as intense or as radical as the one a hundred years ago. It failed to make the government back down on its measures. But it reinforced the value of coordinated action between social movements and the importance of direct action. In this new century, anarchists have a long way to go to rebuild a tradition of struggle.

A Coup d’État? Revolution, State of Exception, and Why We Say *Coup*

“By referring to the coup d’état, we can say (or want to say) that it is part of the past, or that it is a relic of the past; but in fact, is it not anchored to the heart of contemporary government practice? Is it not possible to say that contemporary governmental practice is based on the permanent modality of a coup? Could using the notion of a coup d’état mean that we are interpreting the general economy of power in our societies as if they are relying more and more on practices of exception? Is not speaking of a coup nowadays a way of saying that the functioning mechanisms of power are based on measures of exception and that, consequently, the exception is the paradigm for interpreting our modernity?”

Roberto Nigro, “*Violência de Estado, golpe de Estado, estado de exceção.*”

When we speak of a coup d’état, we touch on something that is still fresh in the country’s memory: in 1964, Brazil lived through a civil-military coup that overthrew a democratically-elected government and put generals in power for 21 years. There was no serious evidence that an armed struggle was about to take power in the country, but economic and military elites felt that it was necessary to act “preventively.” This took place in the context of the Cold War and the dictatorships in Latin America created and supported by the CIA and the American military. They feared that Brazil “would become a new Cuba or a China.” Operation Brother Sam, organized by the US Navy in support of the Brazilian military, drove the entire Caribbean fleet to Brazil on the eve of the coup on March 31, 1964. The coup involved classic images of tanks and troops occupying the streets, taking over the palaces and arresting politicians,

imposing martial law, as well as the military support of the world's biggest imperialist power.

Coup d'état or Revolution?

In the modern era, a coup is a maneuver used either by elite groups or by those within the state to take control of the state and exclude other elites from this control. It does not alter the social order or the position of classes. Since the French Revolution and the rise of modern states, the coup d'état has ceased to be understood as a praiseworthy act undertaken by a noble who must maintain the royal order and is instead seen as an illegitimate violation of the continuity of the State's reason for existence. On the other hand, there are many narratives that praise the revolutions that constituted the modern states. Not coincidentally, the military involved in the 1964 coup in Brazil called the event a "revolution"—and its current supporters still do, just as the coup that instilled the Republic is called a "Proclamation" and the events that put Vargas in power in 1930 are also described as a "Revolution."

As we might expect, when the streets were flooded with demonstrations against Dilma Rousseff and the PT in 2015, the conservative middle class and some far-right groups demanded military intervention. But with the end of the Cold War, the CIA has little interest in supporting military governments in Latin America again, since democratic regimes have proved just as effective as dictatorships in keeping developing countries under the political and economic control of financial institutions and the foreign market. This model spread across the globe.²

Either way, "coup" is a term that is frowned upon and outdated. The correct procedure for an elite wanting to get rid of or overthrow another elite (yes, the PT is just another elite) is an approach

² For more details on the current imperialist maneuvers of the gringos, see the military doctrine of the Hybrid War.

ment froze the education and health budgets for 20 years to calm the financial market.

General Strike: 2017 Reminds Us of 1917

Left-wing social movements and unions mobilized millions of people in an attempt to regain national influence by calling for action in March 2017 and a general strike in April. On March 15, a strike was called in 25 states, but it was not a general strike. On March 31, thousands took to the streets in 23 states against the rollback of labor laws and the outsourcing law proposed by the government of Michel Temer.

On April 28, 40 million people left work in 130 cities across the country in the largest general strike in decades. Workers in transport, banks, schools, universities, airports, commerce, and factories gathered on the streets of every state in the country along with student movements and homeless and landless movements. Protesters in Sao Paulo marched to the door of Michel Temer's house, but were barred entry by police. Black blocs retaliated by scattering throughout the city to attack banks and shops.

Most of the people who took the streets had never participated in a general strike with so much support and mobilization. In 2013 and 2014, the waves of protest didn't spread with as much force or as radical a critique. Anarchists seized the moment to refresh the country's collective memory and commemorate the centenary of the First General Strike of Brazil in 1917—also known as the Anarchist General Strike. At the time, anarchist movements and unions were the largest effective political forces in the country. Previously, strikes had been limited to productive sectors or specific categories of workers. Workers in São Paulo fought against low wages, against the 16-hour workday, against meager wages for women and children. All of these struggles were common at the time, since there was virtually no labor legislation.

Schools became real communes with students organizing themselves in cleaning, cooking, and safety committees. They received support from parents and the general public, and more than 1000 people volunteered to offer free classes and workshops on topics such as graffiti, gardening, health, and gender. Shows and festivals were organized in some buildings. Political parties and the student unions linked to them were prevented from participating: the occupations remained autonomous and horizontal. Following the occupations, the governor's popularity hit a record low, the reorganization plan was repealed, and the Secretary of Education resigned.

After this partial victory, some groups decided to continue occupying some schools. At the beginning of December, 23 schools were already occupied in the state of Goiás, in protest against privatization and militarization. Inspired by students from São Paulo, they demonstrated that the next year was about to open with struggles initiated by an intelligent new generation. In the first semester alone, this new struggle emerged and occupations broke out in Goiânia, Belo Horizonte, Curitiba, Rio de Janeiro, and many other cities

At the end of 2016, schools took the center stage again. At the end of September, a few days after gaining office, the new government announced a constitutional amendment (PEC 55/241) that reduced the state budget ceiling for health and education for the next 20 years. One UN official described this measure as "the most socially regressive austerity package in the world."

Initially, a new wave of occupations began in state high schools against cuts in social security and education. By the end of October, a further 1200 schools and 100 universities were occupied in 19 states. One of the highlights of this mobilization took place on November 29 when senators voted for the measure; about 30,000 students, workers, indigenous people and peasants from all over the country went to the capital Brasilia to protest and clashed with the police, burning cars and attacking the windows and the doors of the palaces. But it was not enough: the law passed. The govern-

that appears to be legal and democratic, like a judgment based on controversial accusations that divide the opinions of political scientists and jurists operating in the territory between the legal and the illegal. We saw similar maneuvers in Honduras in 2009 and in Paraguay in 2012. Perhaps this all indicates that we are entering a new era in which a new type of coup is formulated within the democratic game, building its legitimacy with the support of conservative media and street demonstrations. The consequence is that we cannot call it a coup d'état and they no longer have to call it a Revolution.³

Why We say Coup d'État

With the end of the military dictatorship and the consolidation of the new Federal Constitution of 1988, the Democratic State of Law was constituted in Brazil. According to the constitution, the Brazilian State intended to limit its powers based on the principles of the rule of law (respect for human rights and international fundamental rights) and the Democratic State (respect for democratic elections and constituted laws, promotion of equality of all before the law and of social equality). A state of exception is exactly the opposite of all this, suspending constitutional laws, rights to liberty, and people's bodies and lives; the government concentrates all power in its hands to deal with an emergency situation or a crisis that threatens the state. Prison without justification or defense, repression of social movements, torture, murder: everything is used to guarantee the reign of law and order.

We do not want to posit a Manichean binary between the rule of law and the state of exception. We know that the rule of law is also a police state under the control of the ruling classes and capitalism. We know that the rule of law protects citizens who submit

³ Within the Hybrid War, the term for this strategy is Color Revolution, such as the political destabilization that happened Ukraine.

and that it surveils, arrests, and exterminates those who rebel and those who are not a part of its hegemonic normativity: the peripheral, the non-heterosexual, the black and indigenous populations. We understand that the rule of law does not eliminate authoritarianism or colonial expansion and that the state of exception has become more and more normal. Avoiding the rules, suspending fundamental rights and freedoms—these have become the norm for modern states.

In 2016, we did not see the same militarized landscape of 1964; yet we still call it a coup due to the extralegal and exceptional features that we witnessed during this time. Lula and Dilma's allies say there was a "coup" to situate themselves as victims—as if they had no connection with those who designed their fall, as if it were redemption after years of laboring to lubricate capitalist machinery while the right had yet to return to the center of government. By proclaiming that there was a coup, they assert that the governments of the PT have an unquestionable legitimacy because they were elected by the democratic vote. We do not agree with this type of analysis. In order to describe what happened in 2016, it is necessary to understand the term *coup d'état* with a critical perspective towards the state and its laws. We need to make the use of this word more comprehensible and understand that the term "state of exception" can be used to characterize many of the maneuvers that rulers use to concentrate power. This perspective would be especially beneficial in facilitating an understanding of the measures of exception implemented by the PT itself.

What happened in 2016 is a coup because the PT government was not felled by forces from below, such as the rebellious or the insurrectionary masses. State and economic institutions were left intact. All that happened was that a group of lawmakers proved that it is possible to use an impeachment procedure to overthrow a majority-elected government, and that proving that they committed a crime is not even a prerequisite for doing so.

There were clashes with authorities during the week before independence day marked by police violence, the arrest of journalists, and more demonstrators suffering permanent injuries because of less-than-lethal weapons. Leftist movements harassed and repudiated the presence of the black bloc in São Paulo as being "responsible" for the violent actions of the police. The black bloc tactic had become more common since 2014 and now reappeared in the street to respond to the new government policies, causing controversy. In São Paulo and Belo Horizonte, for example, anarchists and others marched in black bloc formation, but they did not attack the police or break anything. This showed that it was possible to march and demonstrate strength in numbers without necessarily acting "violently." The anarchist presence was important because it emphasized that it would not be enough to say "Temer out," but instead asserted that *no government is an option* and that direct and autonomous action—not the regeneration of democracy—remains our best weapon.

Occupying the Schools

The occupation strategy that spread in 2016 was inspired by the struggles of October 2015, when 200 schools were occupied by students throughout the state of São Paulo. Governor Geraldo Alckimin planned to close 94 schools, firing teachers and affecting the lives of about 300,000 students who would have had to study in overcrowded classrooms far from their homes. In response, on November 9, 2015, about 18 students occupied a school in Diadema, the metropolitan region of São Paulo. Two days later, police officers armed with machine guns attempted to enter the school but failed to force the students out of the buildings.

A few days after this, many demonstrations took place simultaneously, with many confrontations with the police on the streets and at the school gates. Within a month, 230 schools were occupied.

But not everyone is in favor of this nationalist humbug. September 7 is not only independence day: since 1995, social movements have called it the *Grito dos Excluídos* (“Scream of the Excluded”) so that the day is also a day to give voice to popular dissatisfaction. Since the uprisings of 2013, demonstrations on that day have been growing increasingly combative. In 2016, after the coup, that day had a special flavor.

The revolt against the mega-events also continued at the end of the Olympic and Paralympic Games: the gringos were still returning home as 23,000 army soldiers and the National Guard returned control to the police in Rio de Janeiro after the number of police shootings doubled in the first week of the games. There were 95 shootings in Rio de Janeiro, where 51 were injured and at least eight people were killed by police during the three weeks of the Olympic Games (August 5–21). Any kind of demonstration or expression denouncing the impact of events was brutally suppressed from day one. Just 10 days after the Olympics ended, on August 31, the Senate voted for the departure of Dilma Rousseff, and Michel Temer was officially the new president of Brazil.

The World Cup and the Olympics are over, but the legacy of legal abuse, police violence, exclusion, and segregation remain under the shadow of the new regime. So it is not surprising that we also witnessed the biggest anti-government demonstrations since 2013: on September 7, there were protests in 24 states—in almost all of the capitals, including dozens of cities. The largest was in Salvador, where 15,000 attended. In these demonstrations, it was necessary to offer resistance to new government policies, but also against the effects of the policies that were established during the PT government. We had old and new reasons to rebel. On the banners in the streets we saw the demand “Direct Elections Now”—the famous slogan from the end of the dictatorship in Brazil—presented by people who wanted to vote for a new president after the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff.

In democracy, capitalists and career politicians take turns in power according to the outcome of the elections. Eventually, a leftist party or a politician of working class background may reach the government on the condition that they promise to play the same game as those who normally hold office. This game is mediated by laws, that is, by agreements made between elites and imposed on the rest of the population. When these laws are suspended or distorted to favor a powerful group, we call it a coup d’état because it proves that the outcome of the electoral game can be disavowed when an elite is able to manipulate the laws in its favor. Even if all of this is not followed by the establishment of a dictatorship and even if the same constitutional laws continue to apply in the same way, it is still a coup d’état.

All of this instability makes it clear that democracy settled here in the Global South according to a very different model than the European and North American blueprint. We can see clearly that the forces dominating this country are more powerful than the parties and the vote. In democratic countries, states inherited their army, their laws, their prisons and their borders from the kings and their empires. In Brazil, the years of dictatorship left the same police and legal apparatus in place and the same bourgeoisie in charge of industry, the media, and the banks. This heritage is far from being overcome—and it is impossible to reform.

A Century of Dictatorships Punctuated by Brief Moments of Bourgeois Democracy

“There is no clear distinction between dictatorship and democracy. All governments dictate, many dictators are elected, and the subjects of typical dictatorships often have ways to influence the government that are more direct than the means enjoyed by citizens of typical democracies.”

The relationship between the Brazilian Republic, democracy, the coup d'état, and authoritarian regimes is troubled and intense, but it helps situate us in our present context and the path that brought us here. When Dilma Rousseff was elected president in 2010, she was the only candidate to have a vice president from another party: Michel Temer, of the PMDB (Brazilian Democratic Movement Party). This is the largest party in Brazil; today it represents the center-right, with mostly conservative members.

Dilma's maneuver was not something new, but a repetition of a tactic used by her predecessor. Lula had become famous as the first president with a working class background and a past as a union leader. However, he invited José Alencar, a wealthy businessman from a center-right party, to be his vice president. From the outset, the PT government sought to build an alliance between state, political, and economic elites and the aristocracy of labor unions and social movements.

The PMDB originated in the Brazilian civil-military dictatorship, when only two parties were allowed to exist. All other parties were prohibited and some of those on the left joined the armed guerrillas. The ARENA was the military party and the MDB was founded in 1966 as the only party to oppose the regime in a non-clandestine way. After the transition back to democracy, the parties ceased to be illegal. The MDB became the PMDB, and parties such as the PT emerged, along with its current greatest opponent, the PSDB (Brazilian Social Democracy Party).

Historically, the PMDB has had a privileged relationship with powerful groups, parties, and politicians. In 2016, Temer became the third PMDB politician to become president since the end of the dictatorship in 1985. Neither he nor his predecessors were directly elected by vote. The first was José Sarney, who took power when Tancredo Neves, the first civilian president elected by an indirect election after the end of the military regime, died of illness before

ture and in more than a thousand school occupations that took place in 2016.

First Fights and Victories

As soon as he took over as interim president in April 2016, Temer changed all the ministers and assembled a team composed exclusively of men. Nine ministries were done away with altogether, including the ones focusing on culture, women, racial equality, and human rights. Such maneuvers had not been seen since the dictatorship.

At that time, anarchists and autonomous movements were not as visible as they had been over the previous two years. Still, when it was announced that the Ministry of Culture would be eliminated, buildings related to it were occupied in 21 capital cities. People organized debates, concerts, and demonstrations of all kinds to pressure the government to recant.

After two weeks of occupations and protests, Temer took a step back and announced the return of the Ministry of Culture, but the occupations continued in many cities, hosting festivals and all kinds of political and cultural activity. This victory gave the movements the impression that the new government could be defeated in struggles for specific demands. Inspired by recent victories, homeless movements organized a protest on July 1 and occupied the building of the Secretary of the Presidency of the Republic in São Paulo, forcing the president once again to step back and reinstate funds he had tried to cut in housing programs.

September 7, 2016: We Have Never been Patriots

September is when patriots celebrate so-called independence from the Portuguese government which was proclaimed in 1822.

Episodes of Resistance

Since Michel Temer became president, he has been trying to run an economy in crisis and to deal with continual corruption scandals. In less than a year, he has been accused of passive corruption, obstruction of justice, and involvement in a criminal organization. Each move his government makes comes at the cost of the working and excluded classes to favor the elites: he forgave 500 billion Reais worth of entrepreneurs' debts while at the same time proposing to reduce the minimum wage by 10 Reais in order to save 300 million Reais.

In any case, Michel Temer is increasingly politically isolated. Without popular support, his 4% approval rating is even worse than the 8% that Dilma hit just before she was impeached. But his government has yet to fall, because it serves the interests of the market and big corporations. His policy follows the laws of the "Shock Doctrine" manual developed by the Chicago School and its neoliberal gurus. Its main tenets are to implement reforms that reduce state services through privatization, extreme austerity measures, and suspension of laws that protect rights and the environment. One example is the government's new attempt to give away natural and indigenous reserves in the Amazon to mining companies, a political project that would hardly receive public support in the polls, but is easily applied amid crises and catastrophes. The new president's reforms are a desperate attempt to cater to the whims of the market while the right wing prepares for the 2018 elections.

Not surprisingly, since the new government's first days, there have been several rounds of protest and resistance against the new president's policies and measures. Some of these struggles have shown the desire to go beyond just making demands for small concessions from Temer's government, instead staking their protests on the possibility of creating horizontal modes of organizing in which people take matters into their own hands. This was the case in the dozens of building occupations linked to the Ministry of Cul-

taking office. The second was Itamar Franco, who took over the presidency in 1992 after Fernando Collor, the first democratically elected president, was embroiled in corruption scandals and subsequently impeached. Itamar then supported and guided his successor Fernando Henrique Cardoso of the PSDB, who was president from 1994 to 2001, just before Lula.

These episodes are enough to illustrate how messy and fragile the current Brazilian democratic era is. But we can go further and remember that it was a military coup that overthrew the Brazilian Empire and founded the first Republic in Brazil in 1889; and that we experienced two other coups in the 20th century, the first of which occurred in 1930. Of the eighteen presidents who have come to power in Brazil, only eight were elected, and only four completed their terms.

The coup d'état against the PT in 2016 follows a kind of "natural order" in Brazilian democracy, which always seeks to keep control of executive power in the hands of certain elites through non-democratic means.

Coups within the Coup: How the PT Has Improved the State's Repressive Apparatus

To ensure that their economic development project was successful, the Lula and Dilma governments made huge advancements in forms of control and repression in the peripheries and against social movements. The federal government's public safety policy is characterized by its dual maneuvers expanding the prisons and carrying out military occupations in the favelas. In 2014, Brazil's prison population became the third largest in the world, with 570,000 prisoners, most of whom are black. During the PT administration, this figure increased by 620%.

The Pacifying Police Units (UPP) were deployed throughout 38 communities in the city of Rio de Janeiro. They do not intend to en-

sure the “safety” of the population; they were introduced to secure Brazil for mega-events including the Olympics and the World Cup. They are “coincidentally” situated in areas such as roads that connect airports to tourist districts and the region where World Cup and Olympic games are held. In 2014 and 2016, two separate studies by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch concluded that this police force is the one of the most violent in the world.

The National Security Force was created in 2004 during the Lula administration. In 2010, the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the Armed Forces (EMCFA) was created, a post that was responsible for drafting the “Law and Order Guarantee Manual” (GLO) in 2013 to respond to popular uprisings taking place throughout the country. Their task was to secure the profits of national and international corporations during the mega-events. Under pressure from FIFA, the Dilma government implemented the World Cup Laws, criminalizing the street demonstrations, strikes, and movements against the World Cup.

For the World Cup in 2014 and the Olympics in 2016, the government built units of the Integrated Command and Control Center (CICC) in 12 cities. These units became centers where many different police and intelligence forces (Military Police, Civil Police, Federal Police and Intelligence Agency) came together to monitor and suppress demonstrators. The inauguration of the CICCs happened during the 2013 protests against the cost of public transportation and those that followed against the Confederation’s Cup. Its actions included monitoring crowds from surveillance cameras set up across the city as well as spying on individuals and groups. Disguised police officers infiltrated demonstrations and many undercover agents maintained friendships and relationships with activists in order to gather information.

The list of their operations is vast, but to conclude here, it suffices to mention that the last law implemented by Dilma before the impeachment was No. 13,260, the famous anti-terrorism law. In March 2016, giving in to international pressures from the G20,

over access to the country’s natural resources. Brazil’s colonial heritage has never ceased to depend on the sale of commodities and cheap labor to the foreign market.

Anarchists and other anti-capitalist resistance movements need to be aware of how these global disputes are fought in the territories where we are building resistance. The indigenous Zapatistas who took up arms in 1994 in Chiapas, Mexico knew they would be at risk, declaring independence in a land rich in natural and mineral resources that Mexican and US capitalists coveted. The same kind of challenge faces the revolution in Rojava in northern Syria as it takes up arms to end capitalism, patriarchy, and colonialism in one of the world’s most oil-rich regions. In Brazil, indigenous peoples such as the Mundurucus of Pará have offered examples of honorable resistance against the PT government’s genocidal economic development projects which include building eight hydroelectric plants along the Tapajós River, destroying communities, harming the environment, and threatening wildlife. The Mundurucus, a warrior people known as “head-cutters,” have already occupied and paralyzed the construction of the Belo Monte plant in the heart of the Amazon Forest twice and promise to wage war against the construction of the São Luís dam and the demarcation of its lands.

Global capitalism and its command centers clustered in the rich northern countries are willing to turn any territory from the global periphery into a farm to fuel their economies. In addition, they will not hesitate to neutralize popular organization when it threatens their interests. The ground we walk on, the biome in which we live, as well as our bodies, our desires, and our time—these are battlefields in which the same struggles play out between colonies and metropolises that characterize the history of Brazil. The greater their value to the market, the more intense the battle.

Atlas Network, a network of eleven right-wing organizations sponsored by the US oil tycoons, the Koch brothers. When EPL members wanted to participate in street protests, they had to create the MBL because US federal income tax (IRS) legislation does not allow foundations to participate in political demonstrations. According to its president, Atlas' goal is "to fill the world with think tanks that defend the free market."

Shortly after Dilma left, President Michel Temer invited the MBL to help with the government communications department and make the unpopular reforms affecting welfare and labor rights sound appealing. The MBL decided to move away from the government it helped create when it figured out that it would be impossible to cover up corruption scandals.

The strategies used by these right-wing movements closely resemble those used during Donald Trump's campaign in the United States. The use of fake news, manipulated data, hate speech, and controversy to give prominence to an idol for Brazilian trolls mirror what happened in America.

The goal of these movements and the millionaires who finance them is to sideline genuine social movements, destabilize progressive governments, and pave the way for neoliberal policies. This cannot be understood without reference to the global geopolitical context. During the riots of 2013, Wikileaks leaked evidence that the Obama administration was spying on both President Dilma Rousseff and Petrobras, one of the largest state-owned oil companies in the world. Soon after the coup in 2016, the foreign minister of the Temer government began procedures to end Brazil's mandatory oil exploration and to deliver Pre-Sal reserves to multinational corporations such as Chevron.

This can be understood in the context of the East-West clash over Brazilian oil. China, one of Brazil's major economic partners in recent years, is pushing for access to reserves as companies and the US government turn their attention to South American oil firms. The Cold War is over, but international forces are vying for control

the UN, and the International Olympic Committee, the parliament and the federal government created a set of vaguely-worded laws that attacked the right to hold demonstrations and left open wide gaps for interpretation. Federal Citizen Rights Attorney Deborah Duprat said that according to the law, "we never know whether an object we carry can be seen as a tool for a terrorist practice. Even a box of matches can be framed as a weapon."

The anti-terrorism law is described by many social movements and by other politicians as "the AI-5 of democracy," as it targets movements and individuals that question or organize against the state's measures. Between 1964 and 1969, the military regime decreed 17 so-called "Institutional Acts" to remove the rights and powers of citizens and institutions alike in order to concentrate even more power in the upper echelons of the state. These acts were considered "coups within the coup," as they violated laws and rights guaranteed by the Constitution. In December 1968, the military regime decreed Institutional Act number 5 (AI-5), dissolving the National Congress and the Legislative Assemblies. This stripped hundreds of people of their political rights and formalized the State of Exception that was originally only supposed to last 180 days but ultimately lasted for ten years. In this period, real terror was used against the population, including press censorship, arrests, torture, murder, and the disappearances of thousands of people.

Crimes that became framed as terrorism by the new law included looting, vandalism, and arson; these were already considered crimes and did not need a new classification. The laws focus especially on communication and transportation infrastructure. This clearly targets the tactics of civil disobedience traditionally practiced by social movements: blocking streets and highways or occupying schools, universities, and other public buildings.

Carrying, storing, or using explosive or flammable materials may also be framed as a terrorist action. Creating such vague and broad terms for defining what is considered "terrorism" is a way

to criminalize movements and minorities. Rafael Braga, a young black man who slept on the streets of Rio de Janeiro at the height of the 2013 demonstrations, offers an example of what happens when police and judges use their freedom of interpretation: Rafael was arrested on charges of carrying “possibly explosive” material because he carried a bottle of soap. In 2017, he is still fighting for his freedom, the only prisoner still incarcerated from the protests of 2013.

The economic crisis has not improved and the public security crisis has escalated to an absurd level. When Temer’s government sent in the army to occupy the streets of Rio de Janeiro in 2017, this represented a continuation of the PT government’s operations rather than a break from them. Dilma’s and Lula’s governments not only improved Brazilian capitalism, they helped form a whole security system dedicated to surveillance and repression. Along with the crisis, Mr. Temer inherited a new apparatus of laws, structures of control, surveillance and repression technologies that will now be used to contain the masses every time we organize and take to the streets.

The 2016 coup required a series of other small coups against the rights of the working class, those on Brazilian peripheries, and social movements. Just as the 1964 military coup was not just a coup, the parliamentary coup that removed the PT from government is just one more iteration of a long series of authoritarian and exceptional measures.

“In truth, there is no fundamental difference between a dictatorship and a democracy. These forms of governments have all the same capacities for violence, repression, mass murder, torture, and imprisonment as their dictatorial counterparts. In moments of emergency, they can and do use this capacity.”

Peter Gelderloos, *The Failure of Nonviolence*

ments have been able to take advantage of popular revolt to go out into the streets to spread their agendas.

In the case of Brazil, these new conservatives took advantage of a wave of protests that they did not themselves organize to create legitimacy for the coup. These groups fought for space in the streets and for the attention of the new generation of demonstrators as well as the media, and quickly began to organize their own protests to build a social base. From the outset, the new right has been backed by institutions such as parties and think tanks funded by the richest 1%—the national and international elite—to influence political processes around the world. We will talk a little more about the three main organizations that have been central to the Brazil’s new right wing.

The *Vem pra Rua!* (“Come out into the street!”) movement is headed by a millionaire investor who lived in the US and is connected to the youth of the PSDB, the right wing of bourgeois social democracy. Another prominent movement is the Revoltados Online, which only accepts Christians in its membership board, supports fascist politicians like Deputy Jair Bolsonaro (the “Brazilian Donald Trump”), seeks the return of military dictatorship, and makes money from the sale of anti-PT trinkets on the internet.

The largest and yet most obscure is the Free Brazil Movement (MBL). From the start, the group has sought to latch on to popular dissatisfaction: the name seems to be purposely created to sound similar to that of the MPL (Free Pass Movement). This is an attempt to create confusion in those seeking the networks of autonomous collectives and horizontal organizations that initiated the uprisings of June 2013. With young leaders, the MBL intends to encourage the “youth that left Facebook for the streets” to march on the streets for an “absolute free market,” privatization, and the end of social programs.

The MBL was created in 2013 as the public face of the Students For Liberty (EPL) organization, founded in 2012 as a version of Students For Liberty (SFL) in the United States. Both are funded by the

invited people who had no ties with parties to run for election in the legislative branch. In their speeches, they used the words that the autonomous movements made famous: horizontality, autonomy, and “no parties”—even when they temporary affiliation with parties to run for election. In Belo Horizonte, a group formed by intellectuals, university professors, young university activists, and cultural agitators was able to elect two city councilors, one of whom was the most voted-for candidate in the entire city. The political and representational crisis has given way to a recycling of the electoral discourse of those who want to occupy offices and control the state “in the name of the people.” With slogans like “let’s occupy the elections,” reformists showed that thirteen years of a government with a working class man and a woman as president had not been enough to teach them that systems of oppression cannot be changed by putting representatives of oppressed groups in control of them.

We also could not stop some of the people we had invited to the streets from being drawn in by right-wing rhetoric. With immediate proposals and narratives that stirred the fears and insecurities of the average urban citizen, the right drew millions into the streets to demonstrate against corruption—but only the corruption practiced by the Workers’ Party.

Conservatives of the World, Unite

In recent years, a worldwide trend has emerged in which right-wing movements gain popularity shortly after popular uprisings take place. From Brazil and Venezuela to Ukraine, from Greece to the United States, large waves of popular unrest have drawn people out into the streets. Demonstrations and occupations of public spaces have become an essential tool for anyone who wants to promote a cause or pressure rulers. We have observed that after many autonomous, radical, and horizontal uprisings, right-wing move-

From the 2013 Uprisings to the Coup of 2016: How the New Right Rose

“The plague bacillus never dies or disappears for good; it can lie dormant for years and years in furniture and linen-chests; it bides its time in bedrooms, cellars, trunks, and bookshelves; and perhaps the day would come when, for the bane and enlightenment of men, it would rouse up its rats again and send them forth to die in a happy city.”

Albert Camus, *The Plague*

The Streets in Dispute

During the June 2013 uprising, thousands marched uncontrollably, throwing stones and Molotov cocktails. Eventually, the demonstration surrounded and invaded the palaces that house the federal government’s legislative power and demanded the reduction of the bus tariff. The antagonism on the streets took autonomous forms all over the country, breaking the silence imposed by a decade of the Workers’ Party government. This struggle led to an unforeseen victory by new autonomous social movements on a national scale, with people organizing themselves in ways that outstripped political parties and unions, the traditional forms of organization typically used by movements. The disillusionment with democratic processes and the political class system as a whole was even stronger, indicating that this uprising offered a chance for new autonomous forms of organization and direct action to gain widespread popularity. Indeed, this was the chance many anarchists had been waiting for to disseminate their methodologies on a large scale.

For decades, government elites (including the political left and leftist unions) collaborated to decontextualize and delegitimize

what it meant to “do politics.” The practice of doing politics, which had been confined to institutional practices, regained its original meaning: as people occupied the streets, with each gesture, with each choice, with each affect, they were doing politics. The demonstrations became a living body offering an intense and potent experience of collective construction. For many people who had never participated in a street protest before, this was the first time they moved beyond a position of “neutrality,” and the new positions they took were not necessarily coherent. There were dissonant voices expressing many different interests; some tended more towards dialogue, while others preferred confrontation and antagonism. The conservative elites in particular began to construct strategies to co-opt the masses and offer the solutions that many craved, such as those offered by the PT and the government. During that time, the streets become the stage for intense political disputes in Brazil once again, both for those who wanted social justice and for those who wanted a more totalitarian regime.

In 2005, a corruption scheme organized by the upper levels of the PT came to light, proving that it was just as corrupt as any other political party. This scandal permanently stained the party’s image. After winning the elections, Lula’s government did not have a majority in congress. To solve this problem, the party leaders decided to pay a monthly allowance (the so-called Mensalão) to the deputies so that they would approve laws favorable to the government. The scandal involved ministers, deputies, contractors, and businessmen and was widely used by the press to find ways to destroy support for the PT in the upcoming elections.

But the plan did not work. A new political contingent was enough to ensure Lula’s reelection in 2006: the poor and excluded classes that benefited from social programs in the government’s early years.

Having witnessed the failure of the 2005 Mensalão scandal to bring down the PT, those elites opposed to the PT realized that it was not possible to neutralize the party while it still had broad

support from the poor classes and large social movements during favorable economic conditions. But the uprisings of 2013 showed that the PT no longer engaged in dialogue with rebel youth or the urban middle classes. The mainstream media used this opportunity to co-opt messages from street demonstrations and misrepresent popular unrest as directed against the PT specifically. At the same time, the economy was in decline and corruption scandals once again tarnished the party’s image in government. Then, in this favorable context, the right and the bourgeoisie understood that cooperation between the federal police and the judiciary investigating the scandals was necessary. The media was happy to help by supplying biased and manipulative coverage of the investigations. Another fundamental element was the new right-wing movement composed of young people who were aligned with national conservative parties and international neoliberal organizations. These movements were responsible for creating a new social base aligned with the interests of the right in order to build legitimacy for the coup and frame it as if it were a popular demand.

With all this in mind, we look at the 2013 and 2014 fights as an experience with mistakes and victories. Autonomist movements, the renewed leftist activists, and the new right wing movements underwent renovations and developments. Of all these, the right was the party that was strengthened the most. Autonomists (and anarchists) lost much popular appeal after 2013. Our successes strengthened the autonomous movements and piqued many people’s interest in anarchism. But we also made mistakes that paved the way for the regeneration of the right and conservatism. We introduced many new people to a different form of horizontal struggle that didn’t rely on political parties. But we failed to expand the struggle beyond reformist demands.

A new left gained strength, taking the opportunity to frame their rhetoric in a way that capitalized on popular social movements. Inspired by movements like 15M and the party Podemos in Spain (which was itself inspired by the origin of the PT), activist groups